

*al-Radd al-jamīl*—A Fitting  
Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus  
from the Evidence of the Gospel



# A Fitting Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus from the Evidence of the Gospel

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In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, and in him is my trust.

To begin with, praise be to God and blessing on Muḥammad, the best of his creatures, and his family.

## Introduction

I have found the opinions of the Christians related to their doctrines to be weak in construction, lacking in power, and shameful in method. The one who researches them is filled with amazement at intelligent people so inclined to them, and he is unable to achieve his aims with ease as a result of the complexity of them. They only rely on following bare tradition in them, clinging stubbornly to the literal meaning which the earlier Christians gave to them, while Christians of the present day, due to their indolence, do not endeavour to explain their obscure aspects, thinking that this is the divine law which Jesus, on him be peace, gave them. They offer as an excuse for holding to their opinions what is mentioned in texts they take as controlling their thinking, which are not susceptible to metaphorical interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore dissuading them from a literal interpretation is difficult.

In this they are two groups; one group, the larger, is made up of those who do not practise any intellectual disciplines which might enable an observer to see the impossibility of the impossible so that he asserts the impossibility of its existence, the necessity of the necessary so that he denies its non-existence, and the possibility of the possible so that he does not believe that there is no possible necessity for either its existence or non-existence. But pictures have been engraved on their minds since their childhood and their ignorance has persisted until it has become their natural disposition. So healing this group from their malady is difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> Metaphorical interpretation is a method widely used among Muslim theologians in the twelfth century in their interpretation of the Qurʾān. This method was first used by the Muʿtazilite rationalist theologians of Baghdad in their arguments against the anthropomorphic understanding of the characteristics of God according to some Qurʾānic passages which were interpreted literally by a group called al-Mushabbihā.

The other group has a little intelligence and is a little acquainted with intellectual discipline so you will find them turning away from this belief and not tolerating that their thoughts come close to it. Sometimes they rely on the authority of the Philosopher<sup>2</sup> in the question about the union. They elevate the consequences of destroying theories which were approved by evidently rational minds so that they flee from this difficulty to following mere traditions. They believe that the Philosopher had already explained esoteric sciences by demonstrating them with clear proofs, and they think that a philosopher such as this is worthy to be relied on in his teaching and so they blindly follow his opinion about doctrine. For this reason they distance themselves from the question of the union and attach it to the question of the connection between the soul and the body.<sup>3</sup> If these poor people would turn to their intelligence and give up their passion and fanaticism, they would understand that they had departed from the right way and had missed the true path for a number of reasons, as follows:

**[False use of analogical reasoning to connect divinity and humanity in Jesus]**

One reason is that if they did that by way of analogical<sup>4</sup> reasoning then they were mistaken because the analogy leads a secondary premise back to its primary through a common cause on which the judgement depends. But this cause, according to this teaching, conforms to the reality of the connection of which the Philosopher speaks, then afterwards he applies it to the essence of the Creator in order to justify this analogical reasoning. If they did that by way of comparison and example, then they were also mistaken, because what

2 It is possible that the author refers here to Aristotle because most probably the Coptic Christians of Egypt adopted the concept of the Aristotelian soul in its relationship to the body.

3 The earliest known Christian use of the analogy of the union of the soul and body to explain the union of the divine and human in Christ to Muslims can be found in the late eighth-century dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the East Syrian Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I, see H. Putman, *L'Église sous Timothée I (780–823)*, Beirut, 1975, appendix, 10, and in the early ninth century 'al-Risāla fi-l-tajassud', (Letter on the Incarnation) by the Jacobite Theologian Abū Rā'īta, see G. Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Hidma Abū Rā'īta*, (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*), vol. 130, Louvain, 1951, pp. 47–48. See also the Arabic text with English translation in S.T. Keating, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'ītah*, Leiden, 2006.

4 Aristotelian logic was adopted first by Muslim judges in the Umayyad period, and later by Muslim theologians who devoted a section of their study to Aristotelian logic.

something is compared with must be knowable and imaginable to enable the knowledge of it to be conformed to the knowledge of its comparison. If the proponent of this doctrine makes a great effort to provide a vague likeness that pertains to the reality of the soul and the reality of the connection of which the Philosopher has spoken, he would confirm his inability to achieve that, therefore, how can he make use of analogy when these realities are unknown to him?

Moreover, a legal expert does not allow himself to use such an analogy, but it is one of the rarely used analogies called ‘a complicated analogy’; that is trying to establish the clarification of an obscure judgement by using even what is more obscure, or by what requires intellectual effort and deduction from enigmatic proofs for its establishment, like the soul that the Philosopher taught the existence of, which could not be imagined except by complicated and enigmatic thinking. If this is rarely used in secondary premises which are based on easier suppositions then how can it be relied upon concerning the primary principles connected to the essence of the Necessary Existence? How can that claim be made when the basis of the judgement,<sup>5</sup> supposing it can be detected, requires that no connection can be made between God and the essence of any human being, in a similar way to the connection between a soul and a body? For they say if each soul is connected to a body then the condition of its connection to it is the existence of suitability and harmony between the soul and the body through which the connection occurs. And God, may his name be exalted, is far above such things!

Then even if it is proven for them, and if the connection which they have suggested is conceivable in accord with philosophical ideas, they can make no use of it and it does not advance their aim of establishing the divinity of Jesus, on him be peace. The Philosopher teaches that there is a directive connection between the soul and the body, and that pleasure and pain happen to them by means of the connection between them when the sensory power is affected by harmony or its opposite,<sup>6</sup> and it is impossible that this connecting relationship

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5 The basis of the judgement here is *manāt al-ḥukm* in the Arabic version, which refers to the middle term or the middle premise which usually is decisive in a logical argument to deduce a result.

6 Here the author refers to Ibn Sīnā’s teaching on the soul in its relationship to the body that uses the body as its instrument without being itself influenced by the bodily senses but rather receives from the senses messages which it turns to pure immaterial images through its own imaginative faculty. Ibn Sīnā, following Aristotle, was careful to show that the rational soul is not influenced by the bodily senses, and therefore, the author here shows the inconsistency of the Christian theologians, borrowing only partly the Aristotelian concept of the soul.

applies to all that is above described, because the occurrence of pleasure in the essence of the Creator is impossible. It still remains that this directive relationship could happen without the occurrence of pleasure, but this also is useless because the Creator is the director of all the individuals in the world, and he has a directive relationship with each creature.

**[Futile attempts to prove Jesus' divinity from his performance of miracles]**

If it is said that what is intended is a relationship which appears in the violation of normal events like raising the dead and similar happenings, and that these show exactly what is intended by this relationship, the reply is that such a relationship which enables the one who possesses it to perform a violation of normal events is found in others apart from Jesus, on him be peace.<sup>7</sup> For they confess that Moses, on him be peace, changed the staff into a snake. Is raising the dead not equivalent to an inanimate object becoming animate? Surely this is more evidently a miracle because he made alive what had no life at all, so more evidently powerful than restoring the thing to its original state. Then dividing the sea and making each part stand like a great mountain is among the most striking miracles. The Torah, which they believe in, testifies that Moses, on him be peace, withdrew his hand leprous like the snow, and restored it to the colour of his body.<sup>8</sup> It is stated in the books of the kings and judges, which are among the collection of their ancient books read in their churches, that Elijah and his disciple Elisha raised the dead; Elijah's giving life to the son of the widow is not denied by them. The stopping of the sun by Joshua during the capture of the town of Jericho is one of the most astonishing miracles. Moreover, there were prophets among the prophets who were not sent with a message, so what

7 An early Christian appeal to Jesus' miraculous deeds as evidence for his divinity in apologetic writing for Muslims can be found in the eighth century *Anonymous Apology for Christianity*, see Gibson, *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God*, pp. 84–85.

8 For an early ninth century Christian comparison of the miracles of Moses and Jesus designed to demonstrate that although Moses was able to perform miracles by God's power but not by his own ability, Jesus was able to perform miracles in his own name and to 'empower others to do similar work in his name', see Abū Qurra, 'Maymar fi taḥqīq nāmūs Mūsā al-muqaddas wal-anbiyā' aladhina tanadā'u 'alā al-Masīḥ' (Treatise on the Holy Law of Moses and the Prophets who Predicted the Messiah).

prevents this relationship being established in every one of them, except that it was not manifested due to the lack of any need for a message which provides the evidence originating from it?<sup>9</sup>

There is a delicate issue on which it is necessary to remark concerning a formulation in the Noble Book, 'Put your hand into your side, you will withdraw it white without harm',<sup>10</sup> along with a formulation from the Torah, '*we hinneh yādhū mesūrā'th kālshūlagh*',<sup>11</sup> and the meaning of this Hebrew phrase in Arabic is, 'and this is your hand leprosy like the snow;' the Torah states 'leprosy' and the Noble Book clearly states that it is 'white without harm'.

Though the heart may be pricked by this on first sight, it is not difficult for the practised intellectual to hold them together. It is proved that leprosy means a symptom arising from an unhealthy condition occurring because of a weakening mucous which weakens the strength and it is this which is altered from that state to the colour of the body. It is known that the whiteness of the hand of Moses, on him be peace, did not arise from an unhealthy condition, because whoever has an unhealthy condition, such as we have described, is actually harmed, and when his strength increases the condition changes, therefore, in this case the particularity of miracle disappears. However, the whiteness was from an unprecedented miracle, and the nature of an unprecedented miracle is to be different from well-known custom, and the Noble Book indicates this meaning when it says, 'without harm'. In other words, God enabled Moses to make his hand leprosy without harm, and to return it to the colour of his body without any modifying power, so that through a special capacity he was able to perform unprecedented miracles different from well-known custom. For it is a miracle different from well-known custom when it has a cause different from a habitual cause that arises only from it; otherwise it would not be a miracle. Then, this is expressed by the whiteness which was one of its attributes. This is a clear argument.

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9 For the tradition of Muslim argument with Christians that the miracles of Jesus are not a proof of his divinity but are continuous with miracles performed by other prophets see D. Thomas, 'The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic' *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39, 1994, pp. 221–243.

10 Qur'ān 27:12.

11 Exodus 4:6.

## [Misleading reliance on philosophy]

In addition, what weakens their belief in this issue is the theory of the Philosopher<sup>12</sup> concerning the soul and its connection, since they assert its establishment, and the reason for their confidence is their good opinion of that teaching, even though they are not capable of presenting proofs for it. They suppose that those who taught this had devised it from the esoteric sciences, which baffles the intelligence because of its obscure sources and difficult construction, and that such a person's teaching is free from error. However, those who accept this teaching must also follow the Philosopher in saying: that prophecy can be acquired, that the world is eternal and does not experience becoming and decay, that the Creator does not know particulars, that the One only gives rise to one, and that the God of creation is pure existence who does not possess knowledge or life or power or similar things in his essence, by which they reject the injunctions of the legislators and make liars out of the prophets who were sent.<sup>13</sup>

It is strange that they emulate people who forbid the conception of the particular characteristics of the founder of their divine law those who stipulate for them the impossibility of the formation of the child solely from the sperm of his mother without partnership with the sperm of a man, either following the opinion of their leader or, in this particular case, following the opinion of Galen.<sup>14</sup>

If his fanaticism and passion leads someone to hold onto what he is accustomed to by saying, 'Concerning what has been described, proofs have been provided of their error, yet our good opinion of them remains firm', then he should receive the reply that whoever appears to be sometimes in error and sometimes in truth, his teaching can be false as well as true. Nobody should emulate such a person without the support of proofs of his teaching, a person who rejects out of hand the teaching of the legislators<sup>15</sup> and who does not accept the literal meaning of his book that shows the humanity of the founder of his divine law, but who rejects any metaphorical interpretation of passages

12 This is probably another reference to Ibn Sīnā's teaching on the soul in its relationship to the body.

13 Here the author presents all the issues which al-Ghazālī discussed in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* in which he showed that the philosophers erred when they applied demonstrative methods to religious concepts and that the consequences would be the rejection of prophecy.

14 The author here refers to Galen because all his medical works were well known among the Christians, especially of Alexandria, as well as to the Muslim philosophers and physicians.

15 In Arabic, *al-mutasharrīn*, meaning here the prophetic or the revealed text.

that show divinity, according to what they claim, which is to utterly reject rational thinking. How is this possible? In the gospel are passages that make clear the sheer humanity of Jesus, on him be peace, as well as passages testifying that attributing divinity to him, as they claim, is impossible, and these passages are in the clearest of their gospels, the gospel of John the son of Zebedee.

### [Interpretation of John's gospel]

Here, I will describe them passage-by-passage, showing their chapters which are written in it, taking care that they will not disapprove, because their books are not stored in their hearts. Before beginning to describe them, it is necessary to set out two principles agreed upon by knowledgeable people.

The first principle is: passages that appear in agreement with reason should be left as they appear, and if they are in opposition to sound reason then they must be interpreted in the belief that literal meanings are not intended and therefore they must be considered as metaphors.

The second is: if passages are contradictory, some of which affirm sound judgement and others negate it, we should not leave them in conflict, unless we had already sensed in ourselves an utter incapacity for reconciling them and an impossibility of connecting them together in one meaning.

If that is agreed then let us begin now to describe the passages showing the use of metaphor applying to himself what might be misinterpreted as his divinity, as well as passages showing the use of metaphor in the issue of the union, such as his sayings 'I and the Father are one',<sup>16</sup> 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'<sup>17</sup> and 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me'.<sup>18</sup> Then we will continue by describing passages showing his sheer humanity and we will put

16 John 10:30.

17 John 14:9. The presentation of the author appears to be very close to Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 1014) who quotes John 10:30 and John 14:9 together as texts which Christians claim support Jesus' proclamation of his divinity (*rubūbiyya*). He argues that Christians should be told that 'the meaning of "my father" is my teacher and my sender, and his saying "whoever has seen me has seen my father" means whoever saw him and heard his wisdom and his commands and prohibitions', *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, p. 102. He goes on to say that 'there is no doubt about this metaphorical interpretation because if he and his father were (literally) one it would entail the pregnancy, the birth, the being killed, the crucifixion, the eating, the drinking, and the movement being applied to the father' (ibid.). See also the Arabic text and English translation in Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*.

18 John 14:10.



them together with passages that have provoked obscurity in them, that have turned them away from their understanding on account of their inability to interpret them, so that they have become blind and gone astray. By explaining them clearly, and lifting the veil from their difficulties we will restore the truth, splendid to sight and visible in majesty.

[Jesus claims to be one with his Father]

The first passage is described by John in his gospel in chapter 24, as follows:<sup>19</sup>

'I and the Father are one'. So the Jews picked up stones to throw at him, and he replied to them saying: 'I have shown you many good deeds from my Father. For which of them are you going to stone me?' The Jews replied to him saying: 'it is not because of the good deeds that we are going to stone you, but because of blasphemy, for although you are a man you make yourself God'. Jesus replied to them: 'is it not written in your law, I said you are gods, and if it was indeed said of them that they were gods because the word had come to them, and it is not possible that what is written may be refuted, how much more appropriate is it that the Father made him holy and sent him into the world?'<sup>20</sup>

This is the end of his words.

We say this passage enables us to attain our goal for which we have striven concerning the issue of the union. It shows that the Jews opposed his saying, 'I and the father are one', and this related to the issue of the union itself, because they believed that he intended his saying 'I and the Father are one' to be understood literally as meaning that he was truly God. But he, peace be upon him, rejected their denial by announcing clearly that his statement was metaphorical. Then he showed them the metaphorical aspect by offering them

19 The author is following the chapter divisions found in Copto-Arabic versions of the gospels in which there are 101 chapters for Matthew, 54 for Mark, 68 for Luke and 46 for John. His quotations from John's gospel are very similar to Vatican Coptic 9, a version in Bohairic Coptic with parallel columns in Arabic dated 1204/5. His quotation of John 1:14 in Bohairic Coptic suggests the possibility of the author's access to such a version. See C. Padwick, 'Al-Ghazali and the Arabic Versions of the Gospels: an Unsolved Problem', p. 139, and F.-E. Wilms, *Al-Ghazālīs Schrift wider die Gottheit Jesu*, pp. 161–164.

20 John 10:30–36.

an example saying, it is said in your law that you are gods, but you are not truly gods, and I interpret the meaning of this saying to be, ‘The word has come to you and I share that with you.’

An example like this is also found in our Divine Law. The Chief Messenger, the blessing and peace of God be on him, related from the True One, may his name be exalted,

Whoever wants to come close to me will come closest by performing what I have prescribed for him. Then the worshipping servant will continue to come close to me by performing more than I have prescribed, and so I will love him. When I love him I will be the ear with which he hears, the eye with which he sees, the tongue with which he speaks, and the hand with which he strikes.<sup>21</sup>

It is impossible that the Creator is present in any of these members of the body, or that he meant them literally. However, when the worshipping servant exerts all his effort to obey God, he will receive power and help from God which will enable him to speak with the tongue and strike with the hand and to perform other actions that bring him close to God. For this reason it is said of someone who empowers another person to strike with a sword who would not otherwise be able to do it, ‘I am your hand with which you have struck’. This kind of metaphor is used widely, is both good and legitimate and is not rejected.

Jesus, on him be peace, had already indicated in this passage a metaphorical aspect when he said: ‘Because the word came to them’. It is impossible that he meant by ‘the word’ an expression formed in letters but rather he meant a secret message from him that he gave to whichever servants he wished. Thus they gain favour to make them overcome what separates them from God, almighty and exalted; indeed he makes them love only what he loves, hate only what he hates, detest only what he detests, and will only what he wills of words and actions appropriate to his majesty. When they have gained favour to attain this state they become aware of the meaning signified by the metaphor.

The truth of this metaphorical interpretation described above is shown by his, peace be on him, care not to intend a literal meaning of this passage, which has been taken as pointing to the union, in his saying, ‘How much better is the one whom God made holy and sent’. So he declared that he was a messenger, innocent of claiming divinity that the Jews supposed that he claimed. He

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<sup>21</sup> This Ḥadīth can be traced to Ibrāhīm ibn Adham Maṣūir ibn Yazīd ibn Jābir al-Tamīmī al-Ijlī (d. circa 780). See G.C. Anawati and L. Gardet, *Mystique Musulmane*, Paris, 1961, pp. 30–31.

claimed for himself the particular characteristics of the prophets and their high rank above other people who were not prophets, when he said, 'How much better is the one whom God made holy and sent'. In other words, I have shared with you in what the metaphor points to and I am higher than you in rank of prophethood and messengership.

If the example he gave them was not a conclusive reply concerning what they imagined to be the literal intention of the expression, then that would have been a mistake by him and deception in the beliefs, the ignoring of which would lead to God's anger. This is not appropriate for the prophets and messengers who lead people to the truth, since withholding evidence in time of need is not permitted to prophets. How is it possible, when in their books it is said that he was sent to save the world, to show what is necessary for God and what is impossible for him. Therefore, he is saviour of the world when he shows them God who is to be worshipped. If he was the God who must be worshipped and at the same time he turned them away from believing that by giving them this example, then he was commanding them to worship another person by turning them away from worshipping him. The implication that he was the God who must be worshipped is deception and error, which is not appropriate for one who claimed that he came to save the world. Indeed it is not appropriate for one who is appointed from among the people for their guidance and direction, far less to one who explains that he was sent as a guide and director.

If it is said that he gave them the example deceitfully to deflect from himself their malice that made him anxious, we say, being afraid of the Jews is not appropriate for one who, it is said, claimed that he was God of the universe and Creator of the world. I wish I knew what the opponent would say after these truths became more obvious to him than the break of dawn, and how he could fail to interpret this passage and others like it metaphorically, and stumble about in the darkness when the founder of this divine law had interpreted it metaphorically himself.

**[Jesus prays that his followers will be one as he is one with his Father]**

The second passage is recounted by the aforementioned John in his gospel in chapter 37 as follows: 'Holy Father, keep them in your name that you gave me, so that they may be one with you as we are'.<sup>22</sup> This passage is like the previous passage, confirming that he turned from the literal to the metaphorical meaning described above. It shows that he, peace be upon him, prayed to God,

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22 John 17:11.

almighty and exalted, for his disciples, that he would be a protector for them in his name just as he protected him, in order that they receive by this protection a union with God. Then he used a particle of comparison when he said, 'As we are', meaning a union like my union with you. If his union with God is the reason for his entitlement to divinity, then he must have prayed that his disciples become gods. This is shameful occurring in someone who lets go of his reason but especially shameful for someone with the slightest soundness of mind. Moreover, this passage refers to the metaphor already described where he, on him be peace, prayed to God to pour upon them his blessings, his regard and his assistance to guide them to his will which is appropriate to his majesty; so that they would only will what he wills, only love what he loves, only hate what he hates, only detest what he detests, only speak and act as he pleases and brings into effect. So when this condition arises in them the metaphor is appropriate. The evidence for the truth of this is, if a man has a friend who agrees with his aims and wishes in such a way that he loves what he loves, hates what he hates, and detests what he detests, it is acceptable for him to say, I and my friend are one.

He, on him be peace, also showed in this passage that his union with him is metaphorical, and that he is not really God, when he said, 'That they may become one with you as we are'. He meant, if they obtain assistance from you that makes them will only what you will, their union with you would be like my union with you; my condition with you is that I only want what you want and only love what you love. Also in his saying, 'Holy Father, keep them in your name', he prayed to God who held their welfare and their injury in his hand. If he himself were God then he would have been capable of keeping them without imploring someone else and beseeching him to protect them. I marvel at these signs that he intended a metaphorical meaning and that he turned the words away from a literal meaning.

Paul, in his letter sent to the Corinthians, gave an example similar to the intention of these passages, when he said, 'Whoever clings to our lord becomes one spirit with him.'<sup>23</sup> This statement of his shows that he understood the essence of what we have understood, and that he comprehended that these passages are not intended literally.

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23 1 Corinthians 6:17.

**[Jesus passed on the glory given to him by the Father to his followers so they could be one]**

The third passage is also recounted by the aforementioned John in his gospel in chapter 37 as follows;

Make them holy in your truth, because your word in particular is truth. As you sent me into the world, I am sending them also to the world. For their sake I make myself holy that they may be made holy in the truth. I do not ask for these alone but for those who will believe in me through their speech, that they may all be united. As you, Father, are dwelling in me and I in you, may they also be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may become one as we are one.<sup>24</sup>

This passage is very clear and it agrees very strongly with what we have said and shown to the effect that he, blessing and peace be on him, lifted the veil of obscurity, and indicated the metaphorical aspect when he said, 'I have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may become one'. In other words, may this glory unite them and produce actions that unite them in obeying you, loving what you love, hating what you hate, willing what you will, so that they become as one person for there is no difference in their thoughts, deeds and beliefs, as we are one. This is to say, as I am one with you, because your glory that you gave me made me love only what you love, will only what you will, hate only what you hate, detest only what you detest, and no action or speech issue from me unless you are content with it. If it is established that this is his condition with God, it shows that the one who obeys him obeys God, may his name be exalted, and the one who obeys God obeys him, and this is the characteristic of the sent prophets. Then, emphasising the metaphorical aspect, he said, 'As you, Father, are dwelling in me, and I am in you, may they also be united in us'. He intended to say, may their words and deeds be in agreement and joined together with your will. Your will is my will. We together are like one essence, for there is no difference in our wills.

Then he, on him be blessing and peace, out of a concern that a weak individual might hold to a literal meaning of these passages, declared that he was a messenger by saying, 'That the world might believe that you sent me'. He emphasised this clearly when he said, 'I do not pray for these alone but for those who will believe in me that all of them may be one as we are one'. He intended

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24 John 17:17–22.

that his unity with him would not entail his divinity, otherwise their union with God, whom he asked that they may be one with him, would be like that. Notice how much beauty is contained in this passage. There are unambiguous statements explained by their factual intention. There are literal statements but not explained by their literal intention. There are metaphorical statements related to meanings which prevent them from bearing their factual meaning. These are good qualities that they barely notice, and they turn away from them. May God bless the person who said,

How many find fault with a true word. They fail through a faulty mind.  
But each person hears it according to his ability and knowledge.

It is also explained in the gospel of John in chapter 25, that the interpretation given above is the intended one when he says, 'Whoever believes in me does not believe in me alone but also in the one who sent me, and whoever has seen me has seen the one who sent me.'<sup>25</sup> When he made obedience to himself obedience to God, he must have been talking about God. He said, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the one who sent me', which is to say, I speak the truth about him and my command is his command and my prohibition is his prohibition. All my judgements emanate from him. This is the characteristic of the true prophets.

Among the clearest evidence that the factual sense of these passages was not intended, and that they should be interpreted metaphorically as above described, is that the Evangelist John, son of Zebedee, author of the gospel that contains these passages, regarded by them as one of his most eminent disciples and who they go as far as to call 'Beloved of the lord',<sup>26</sup> having understood these passages, and that they had been diverted from the literal to the metaphorical meaning described above, said in his first epistle contained in the book of epistles,

Nobody has seen God, so if we love one another God dwells in us and his love is made perfect in us. By this we know that we dwell in him and he also dwells in us, because he has given us of his Spirit and we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son to save the world.<sup>27</sup>

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25 John 12:44.

26 John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, and 21:7.

27 1John 4:12–14.

He also mentioned in the letter, 'Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he also dwells in God'.<sup>28</sup> This disciple, esteemed by them, applied these words to the explanation of the indwelling, when he said, 'By this we know that we dwell in him and he dwells in us'. If this disciple, esteemed by them, understood that the indwelling that Jesus, blessing and peace be on him, explained in the above passages necessitated divinity, then he was ascribing to himself and to the others divinity, when he said, 'By this we know that we dwell in him and he also dwells in us'. They do not believe that about him, nor about any of the rest of the disciples and followers of Jesus, blessing and peace be on him. Therefore, it is certain that he understood these passages metaphorically as we have indicated in the preceding description.

The following statement proves that he pointed in the direction of the metaphorical aspect, 'Because he has given us his Spirit'. He meant that he poured out on us a mystery and providence through which we come to know what pertains to his majesty. Then he made us accomplish the deeds in accordance with it, so that we will only what he wills, and love only what he loves. Therefore, the situation returns again to the metaphorical meaning already described.

However, there remain in the third passage abstruse points which can only be understood by pure, clear thought, in his saying, blessing and peace be upon him, 'I have given them the glory that you gave me'. The literal meaning of this formulation shows, generally speaking, that he, on him be blessing and peace, pointed to the said glory, then described it by saying, 'That you gave me'. This is literally intended to mean all the items that encompass the glory, and it is illustrated when someone says, 'I gave someone the dirhams that you gave me' or 'The present that you sent me', which is meant literally in general. However, if we are fair, we know that the factual meaning is not intended, because in the fullness of the glory that was given to him is prophethood and messengership, and what entails from them in rank, the ascent to heaven, and his power to perform unprecedented miracles. For these are facts that were not literally intended in 'the gift'. Therefore, after this there is no doubt that this expression bears a definite meaning, otherwise it must be prevented from being understood. It can only be that he intended by 'the gift' to make them realise what pertains to the majesty of God, almighty and exalted. Then he asked for assistance for them, in performing the deeds in accordance with it, from God, All Powerful to execute this, by saying, 'Make them holy in your truth'. In other words, I have made them realise what pertains to your majesty, and this

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28 1John 4:15.

is the task of the sent prophets, so guide them and help them to perform the deeds in accordance with it, for it is a quality of God, the All Powerful to create deeds.

If it is said, why is it not possible that the phrase ‘The glory that was given to him’ means the union which entitles him to be divine? Even though the evidence has been presented of the absence of his intention, that it was not given, and thus was not intended, yet it may be included in the meaning of the expression in general. We say, how preposterous, at this point wise advice should be poured out upon us. Is it possible that divinity be bestowed when the impossibility of this is a matter upon which intelligent people have unanimously agreed? Is this not simply like confiscation of goods for what is owed when the only proof which can be relied on is the literal meaning which we have interpreted for them? The founder of their divine law interpreted them metaphorically, defending this interpretation of them to guard against intending their factual meaning.

Such a difficulty is not resolved by mere possibilities without being proved with certain proofs, especially in a person whose humanity is affirmed in its requirements, necessities and characteristics such as a living being, speech, fatigue, hunger, thirst, sleep, gestation in the womb, and his suffering, according to their belief in the crucifixion, when he said, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’<sup>29</sup> All of this is contrary to the divinity. How can this be denied when in the gospel of Mark it is stated,

On the next day they left Bethany and he was hungry; he noticed a fig tree in the distance with leaves, so he approached it to look for fruit on it, but when he reached it he only found leaves on it because it was not the time for figs.<sup>30</sup>

He clearly declared in this passage his experiencing hunger, and his supposing things contrary to what they are because he supposed that there would be fruit on it, but his supposition was wrong. He supposed either that the time was a time for figs or he supposed that it produced figs outside the time for figs, but neither of these suppositions agrees with the facts.

If it is asked, what useful lesson is there in the withering of the tree? We say, he did that to confirm his disciples in their faith, and to awaken their desire to increase the deeds that are similar to this action in some of its results, because the prophets and the saints, when they were promised paradise, were promised

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29 Matthew 27:46, and Mark 15:34.

30 Mark 11:12–13.



it surrounded by adversities. Enduring and accepting hunger is one of the most severe adversities, and by enduring calamities the piety of the Sufi masters is fortified, yet adversity defeats many ordinary people. So when he showed them such an action, which is among the fruits of good deeds, he was awakening a desire in them for the increase of its causes and made them despise misfortunes and pains of the world. By doing this he wanted to demonstrate that the test of the prophets by hunger and suffering is not a kind of humiliation for them or their ranks, but a kind of test and trial. So whoever perseveres by praising and being content has the power to perform things like that.

The evidence for the truth of this interpretation is his saying to Peter in the remainder of this passage when the latter said to him, 'Master, this fig tree that you cursed has withered';

If you had faith in God, truly I say to you, if someone should say to this mountain, move and throw yourself into the sea, and he does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he said will happen, then it will happen for him.<sup>31</sup>

All that is evidence that withering it was in the category of miracles that the saints perform, because he affirmed for them that sainthood can move mountains and throw them into the sea, and that is more profound than withering it. He also offered and declared something similar in the gospel, when he said, 'Truly I say to you whoever keeps my commands does the deeds that I do and greater than these he will do'.<sup>32</sup>

The statement of the gospel in this passage about his hunger and the statement about looking for fruit from it confirms it. This also refutes the teaching of the one who says that he did that to show them that he had power to cause death to living things, because that would make the author of this passage in the gospel a liar when he says, 'He was hungry', and 'he approached to look for fruit on it', as reasons for his approaching it. Isn't what they think utter foolishness in their reasoning? Because he only came to it to look for fruit on it, as he might have said, being hungry I noticed a tree and I approached it to look for fruit on it, and I did not find anything, so I cursed it with dryness to show that I am a 'God All Powerful' to cause death to living things. This is the kind of speech of foolish people. May God be exalted far above that.

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31 Mark 11:21–22.

32 John 14:12.

[Jesus confesses ignorance about future events]

The fourth passage is narrated by Mark in his gospel in chapter 44, 'Concerning that day and that hour, no-one knows, not the angels that are in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father alone'.<sup>33</sup> In this passage he makes clear his definite humanity, denying to himself the knowledge pertaining to God and this is one of the clearest indications of his definite humanity. Their insanity has led them to understand that the angels and the Son are attached to the pronoun of the 'hour'.<sup>34</sup> The assumption of this insanity is: that day and that hour are not known by anyone, nor are the angels nor the Son, but only the Father alone.

It is an astonishing thing about this teaching how it has overlooked that the attributes of God, even if they are not affirmed by certain proofs, then at the very least their existence is clearly evident. Notice how far-fetched is this interpretation that is repugnant to the ear and how much it contradicts the literal meaning. Furthermore, when one who teaches it was driven into a corner, and it was said to him, which expression in this passage could be understood to relate to a question about the angels and the Son? In order to arrive at the corresponding reply, he inclined to a lie, saying that he (Jesus) knew that they asked him about the angels and the Son and he gave them a quick reply. Moreover, its interpreter explained that it was a means to escape from denying knowledge appropriate to God and that is exactly present in what he described in the interpretation, but the ignorance in it is greater. It shows that if he attached the Son and the angels to the pronoun of 'hour' its meaning would be: concerning knowledge of the hour itself and the true knowledge of the Son and the angels, no-one has knowledge of them except the Father alone.

If he, on him be blessing and peace, intended the Son to refer to himself and intended the Father to refer to God, may his name be exalted, then what they flee from is exactly what they return to, but which is increased in ignorance because, in the above passage, he clearly only denied to himself knowledge of the exact hour. Yet in this interpretation he denied to himself knowledge of the exact hour as well as true knowledge of himself and true knowledge of the angels. How amazing is such a mentality! A rational person should praise God for protecting him from derangement. What is more ridiculous than trying to deny a lesser ignorance by affirming a greater ignorance? So it is clear that contradicting the obvious meaning of this passage by means of what he said is

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33 Mark 13:32.

34 The author is arguing that Christians who hold to the divinity of Christ are driven to reject the obvious intention of Jesus' statement by interpreting the pronoun 'it' not to refer to 'the hour' but to 'the angels and himself', which would be absurd.

an insanity that is too repugnant to intelligent people to waste time in being pre-occupied with it.

[Jesus claims to be sent by the one true God]

The fifth passage the aforementioned John narrates in his gospel in chapter 37,

Jesus said this, then raised his eyes to heaven and said, my Father, the hour has come, so glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you. As you gave him the authority over everybody, he gives everybody that you gave him eternal life. And this is eternal life that they know that you alone are the one true God and that the one you sent is Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup>

He clearly ascribed messengership to Christ, and it is not possible to refer that to the humanity because Christ is a name, according to them, for the true reality composed of divinity and humanity. So if someone claims that this bears a metaphorical meaning, his words would not be sound, and he is refuted by the impossibility of making such an application to what is customary. If someone should say, 'I saw ink' when he intended iron sulphate with respect to iron sulphate being separated from the inkiness, then this is totally incorrect. After all this, he may resort to showing that the language of the gospel, according to its rules, expresses the whole but intends the part. If he uses this, then what we have indicated is a sufficient reply, due to the similarity of the Arabic language. If he does not use it, then the objection falls and there is no need to give any reply. Then he asserted that when he said, 'So that he gives to all those who you gave him eternal life'. Moreover, he explained eternal life saying, 'And this is eternal life that they know that you alone are the one true God and that the one you sent is Jesus Christ'. Therefore, he attributed to God the divinity and the oneness, and attributed to himself the messengership.<sup>36</sup>

35 John 17:1–3.

36 This is the same interpretation given by 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. circa. 855) in his *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* (Reply to the Christians) of John 17:3. al-Ṭabarī argues that although the Christian creeds teach three gods (*thalātha āliha*) the gospels do not. The declaration of Jesus in John 17:3 'is the pure, unadulterated oneness (*al-tawḥīd*) and the confession that he was sent, and this is the faith of the Messiah and of all the prophets', *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, pp. 121–122. See further, Thomas, 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī: a convert's assessment of his former faith', pp. 137–155.

Paul the apostle also explained the truth of this when he described the resurrection saying, 'Then the Son will be subject to the one who subjects all things to himself'.<sup>37</sup> He describes him being subject to God at the resurrection and this is appropriate to worshipping servants subject to the majesty of God. He describes God as having the power to subject everything to his majesty, and this is appropriate to God the All Powerful.

He also mentions in his epistle that he sent to Ephesus, 'I never stop giving thanks for you and remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the spirit of wisdom and clarity'.<sup>38</sup> So he made it clear by asking for the gift from the God of Jesus Christ, describing God as the glorious Father, and making him the God of Christ whose name, according to them, is the third reality.<sup>39</sup>

He also explained this in the book of the epistles, when he said, 'There is one God and there is one mediator between God and humans, the man Jesus Christ'.<sup>40</sup> The gospel is also clear, 'Do not call anyone master on earth, for you have one master, Christ, and do not call anyone father on earth for you have one Father who is in heaven'.<sup>41</sup> This is evidence of a distinction, because he described himself as having exclusive teaching on the earth and described God as having exclusive fatherhood and if he intended to attach the Father to God then he described him as having exclusive divinity. Then he indicated the aspect of the exaltation, when he said, 'For you have one Father who is in heaven', and this passage Matthew relates in his gospel in chapter 76.

In addition, it is amazing how they deny that his subjection excludes his divinity when he was the one who said at the raising of Lazarus, as he raised his eyes to heaven: 'Father, I thank you for listening to me and I know that you always listen to me, but for the sake of the crowd gathered here, that they might believe that you sent me'.<sup>42</sup> John set this forth in his gospel. He also said on the night of the crucifixion, according to their opinion, 'If it is possible then take this cup from me',<sup>43</sup> imploring God. He said when he was crucified, according

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37 1 Corinthians 15:28.

38 Ephesians 1:16–17.

39 The author later describes the teaching of the Jacobites that after the union of the divinity with the humanity in Christ a third reality occurred, which was different from each of those two realities, and was composed of divinity and humanity.

40 1 Timothy 2:5.

41 Matthew 23:8–9.

42 John 11:41–42. 'Alī al-Ṭabarī similarly argues on the basis of verse 42 that Christians cannot assert the divinity of Christ when he himself proclaims that 'God was the one who sent him to the world'. See *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 135.

43 Matthew 26:39.

to their opinion, *‘Ilūwī, Ilūwī, līmā sāfakhthānī’*<sup>44</sup> and these are Hebrew words which mean ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ What God is this person who doubts the possibility of the removal of the cup and raises his voice asking his God why he had left him? Furthermore, he distinguished between his will and the will of his God when he said, ‘Not according to my will but according to your will’. These excerpts are contained in the gospel of Matthew.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, he also distinguished between himself and his God when he said, ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God and believe in me.’<sup>46</sup> These words are contained in the Gospel of John in chapter 32. In addition, he clarified the distinction when he said in chapter 7 of this gospel, ‘Whoever hears my words and believes in the one who sent me will receive eternal life.’<sup>47</sup> So he explained that he had a sender and it is known that the sender is not the one who is sent. Moreover, he made eternal life conditional on faith in his sender, and on hearing his words that report about God. This is such a clear presentation of the characteristics of the sent prophets that it cannot be hidden from anyone except a blind person who is unable to see the moon.

### [Jesus says he is a man who has listened to God]

The sixth passage is also narrated by John in his gospel in chapter 21. Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children you would do the deeds Abraham did, but at this moment, you want to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that he heard from God’;<sup>48</sup> and also in the same chapter, ‘Indeed I have many more words to say to you and with which I could deliver a judgement, but the One who sent me is truth and what I have heard from him I speak in the world’;<sup>49</sup> also in the same chapter, ‘For I do not speak for myself, because the Father who sent me gave me the command about what I should say and about what I should

44 Matthew 27:46, and Mark 15:34.

45 The author appeals to Matthew for evidence of the humanity of Jesus. Muslim refutations of the divinity of Jesus typically used statements of Jesus from the synoptic gospels to counter Christian claims for the divine nature in Christ, as in the refutations by al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥasanī al-Rassī, al-Ṭabarī and al-Bāqillāni. See further, M. Beaumont, ‘Early Muslim Interpretations of the Gospels’, *Transformation* 22, 2005, pp. 20–27.

46 John 14:1.

47 John 5:24.

48 John 8:39–40.

49 John 8:26.

pronounce, and I know that his command is eternal life, and what I say is what the Father commanded me; so I speak'.<sup>50</sup>

In this passage he clearly implied humanity when he said, 'A man speaks to you the truth that he heard from God'. In other words, I am a man. He explained that he was sent and that he only did what he had been commanded, when he said, 'I have told you the truth that I heard from God', and when he said, 'as the Father has commanded me so I speak'. Paul the apostle had pointed out his definite messengership in his epistle that he wrote to the Hebrews, when he said, 'Consider this messenger, the great high priest of our faith, Jesus Christ, entrusted by the one who sent him and he is like Moses in all of his house'.<sup>51</sup> He meant by 'his house' the tribes that he had been sent to, explaining that he was among their great leaders, that he had a sender and that he was entrusted by him, and then he compared him to Moses in all of his house. This is evident from the rest of his words describing Jesus, on him be blessing and peace, 'his house' is us, the community of the believers. If it is affirmed that the intention of 'all of his house' is his nation, the meaning of the words would be that he is like Moses in his nation. This is an explanation of his pure messengership.

He explains in this epistle what makes this clear, saying, 'For each house has a man that built it and the one who built everything is God'.<sup>52</sup> He intended by this that each one of these two messengers has been a guide for his nation and the one who guides all of them truly is God. This metaphorical interpretation is clearly supported in the gospel, when he says, 'I am the true vine and my Father is the grafter of each branch in me'.<sup>53</sup> John included this passage in the chapter about the Paraclete.<sup>54</sup> In the language that this letter was translated from, the entrusted one is a servant of the one who created him.

There remains an investigation at this point; It is an example of the preceding metaphor and it applies to the expression 'the indwelling', and applies to 'I and the Father are one'. This use is not permitted at all to the founder of our divine law or to anyone from his community, but Jesus is a founder of a divine law and each divine law has particular regulations. When he (Jesus) spoke in these passages he removed any suspicion of intending a literal meaning by offering them a simile showing that he was permitted to apply it and to use the above mentioned metaphor. Likewise, he applied it to the fatherhood and the sonship, and we will describe the meaning which led him to apply it to them.

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50 John 12:49–50.

51 Hebrews 3:1–2.

52 Hebrews 3:4.

53 John 15:1–2.

54 The Paraclete is mentioned in John 14:16, 26, 15:26 and 17:7.

I wish I knew what excuse the stubborn person could offer to excuse himself after his (Jesus') admission of his humanity, his messengership, his submission to the regulations by which he was commanded, and his metaphorical interpretation of himself, in the preceding passages that would literally mean the union. He removed that meaning from some of them by offering the aforementioned simile to the Jews, made clear in some of them his messengership, and in others took the stand of the obedient servant, by earnestly praying to God, exalted and glorious, calling down good deeds from God for his disciples by saying, 'Keep them in your name that you gave me', and by saying 'Make them holy in your truth'. Then, when the narrow straits confine him, you see him altering like a chameleon; if he finds what shows his (Jesus') humanity he makes it refer to his humanity, and if he finds a literal meaning which he cannot interpret metaphorically he refers it to his divinity. See how God has blinded the vision of the one who makes his god sometimes a human being and sometimes a god. May God be greatly exalted far above what they say.

**[The union of divinity and humanity in Jesus according to the three main Christian communities]**

**[The union according to the Jacobites]**

We certainly must refute without neglecting its repugnance and improbability so we say: they<sup>55</sup> believe that God created the humanity of Jesus, on him be peace, then he appeared in it, and united with it. They mean by the union that a connection occurred between him and it like the connective relationship

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55 Only at the end of the section does the author name the group he is referring to here as 'the Jacobites', named after Jacob Baradaeus who promoted the belief that Christ was a unity of hypostasis and physis such that the one physis was equivalent to the hypostasis of the divine word, in the period after 536 when the Emperor Justinian condemned this 'one nature' Christology as heresy. The Empress Theodora encouraged Jacob in his leadership of the miaphysite view and Jacob is said to have ordained clergy with these beliefs. See Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, p. 182, and A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2.2. pp. 504–507.

between the soul and the body.<sup>56</sup> Then with this connective relationship, a third reality occurred, different from each of the two realities, composed of divinity and humanity, and having the attributes of all that is required from each of them, with respect to him being God and man. They have committed grievous errors in asserting this reality, and it would have been better for them to hide them, for only an idiot who is without shame says what he wants to. They assert for it all the characteristics, necessities, requirements and attributes of the humanity, and all that is required and is impossible for God, with respect to him being God, and they affirm that it is different from each of the two, despite sharing in all that has been described. This is the utterance of one who has no intelligence.

This reality bears the title among them of ‘the Messiah’, yet this is completely mad and an abandonment of the clearest truth. Are they not, in speaking this way, like the one in the saying, ‘The idiot sought for a pregnant stallion and when he did not find it he looked for the eggs of a cock’?

Although they try to establish a connective relationship between the essence of God and that of Jesus, on him be peace, like the connective relationship between the soul and the body they cannot achieve it. They claim to establish it by mere possibility without producing an argument leading to what they suppose, so how can they claim to establish the existence of that which cannot possibly exist?

The proof of the impossibility of this is, if the existence of every composite reality depends upon the existence of its parts and its particular composition, then in this case it would be dependent, in its existence, on the existence of its parts and each part of it would depend on its being a certain part with certain characteristics of being connected to other parts. The supposition is that one part of this reality is the divinity and its other part is the humanity, and this

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56 The Jacobite philosophical theologian Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī (d. 974) refers to the union of the soul and the body as an analogy for the union of the divinity and humanity of Christ. See E. Platti, *Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, de l’Incarnation*, pp. 83, pp. 85–86, and especially pp. 198–199, where Ibn ‘Adī argues that the union between the soul and body of a human being is the best analogy available for the union between the divinity and the humanity. That this analogy was traditionally associated with the Jacobites is seen in the earliest known Muslim reference to this analogy in *al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣāra* (Reply to the Christians) by al-Qāsim where he notes that the Jacobites believe that the eternal Son took a body from the virgin Mary and became one human being which is one like ‘a spirit (*rūḥ*) and a body (*jasad*)’, p. 16. See also the summary of various approaches to describing the union of the divine and human in Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq, ‘al-Radd ‘alā al-ittihād’, pp. 89–95, where al-Warrāq describes this theory as the word uniting with a human body such that the word is the controller of the body.



would require for the divinity the attribute of being a part and a part being connected to it in order to achieve the composition already described.

Therefore, the divinity is in need of the human being, and that is impossible, clearly false. However, it may not be intended by ‘the composition’, a composition of mixture or union or proximity, but if it is intended to be something like that, it is an even more profoundly corrupt notion. Perhaps it was reported by some of the foolish among them that the reality of this composition is not known, and the reply to them should be that contradicting sound reason and relying on something irrational is foolishness and absence of intelligence.

Then we also say concerning the principle: if God, when he created the humanity, appeared in it, and united with it, then indeed an attribute newly occurred in him after he created it, which is his union with it and his appearing in it. Then we say: if this attribute is a necessary existent, it is impossible for it to be described as contingent, and if it is a possible existent, it is impossible for it to be an attribute of the Creator because all attributes of the Creator are necessary existents. This is because what requires its non-existence to be impossible is a necessary existent, and it is clearly impossible that the attributes of God entail non-existence.

If it is said that if this is required, then the creation of the world is impossible, since the creation of just one created thing is impossible. This is because if God, exalted and glorious, created one created thing, an attribute would have newly occurred in him, and he would be circumscribed by his creation. Therefore, the above mentioned impossibility is entailed. The reply is that this is not at all entailed because the meaning of the saying ‘God is Creator’ is his ordaining of the creation in eternity and this attribute is established in him eternally. When he created a created thing, then his knowledge of its existence in the time of its creation, and also the power of producing it in that time were both established eternally.<sup>57</sup> Therefore the only new occurrence is its existence, and its existence is not an attribute existing in the essence of God, may his name be glorified, but is in the essence of the created thing. Concerning relating existence to the effect of the power in performing an action in the moment of its existence, surely this is in the category of relations and attachments, and relations and attachments are not in the category of existence, like ‘above and below’, and ‘fatherhood and sonship’. This notion is clear and perceivable, contrary to what has been

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57 The author is well acquainted with al-Ghazālī’s works, especially *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, where he defends God’s knowledge of all things, without this causing change in him, through his eternal knowledge. Here the author is producing a very similar argument that God is the creator without this causing change in him because his decreeing creation is one of his eternal attributes.

mentioned above, because if he united with the humanity, this union would be an attribute added to his essence. May God be exalted far above that.

Therefore if the existence of this reality is supposed, then the teaching that it is a third reality different from both the divinity and the humanity, characterised by all that is necessary to each of them of the characteristics of the human and its requirements and attributes with respect to being a human being, and what is necessary to God, and what is impossible for him, concerning the attributes with respect to being God, is absurd speech and there is no hope for anyone in proving it. It is evident that something is only qualified by an attribute if this description is possible. If that is established, it is not acceptable that the properties of the divinity and the properties of the humanity come together in this reality. This is because all of the attributes necessary to the divinity and others which are peculiar to it with respect to being divine and which distinguish it from anything else, if they are established in the third reality would be the divinity itself. The same could be said about the humanity, because it shares with the two of them in all necessities of each, and all requirements and attributes with respect to being divine and human, according to what has been mentioned above.

Then if a distinction is established, and this is indeed the case, there would be established in this entity all the characteristics of the human being essential to his reality, and all non-essential distinctive characteristics, along with all that it is supposed to be a reality distinct from the reality of the human being. This is clearly impossible. Whenever all the fixed essentials of the human being and all his established non-essentials with respect to being human are found in a thing they necessitate the human reality in that thing. At the same time they exclude what is different, otherwise these things would not be established in it with respect to being human and indeed we must suppose it to be like that. This is an absurd argument.

Moreover, if the reality is perfectly divine then the characteristics of perfect divinity are established in it and among the attributes of perfect divinity are, that it is not composed of itself and of the humanity because it would entail that the essence of God needs the human being for its existence and be preceded by him and also by (the reality) itself. If a sect does not recognise a clear error such as this then 'the griffon of the west' must be true.<sup>58</sup>

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58 According to Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon, 'griffon of the west' (*'anqā' mughrib*) refers to a fabulous bird that no one has seen which supposedly lives in the far west.

If it is said that this only follows when we ascribe to the reality all attributes and other qualities that are necessary to the divinity, and likewise we should say about the humanity with respect to the reality; however, when we apply to both the humanity and the divinity all of the rules and attributes established before the composition, then why do you say that is unacceptable?

The reply is, if the predicates of all that is necessary to each of them with respect to being divine and human are considered apart from the composition, it is impossible to apply them to the third reality, because this would be applying a rule about a single unit being a separate entity. But if they are considered in the composition, it is impossible that all of them remain after the composition, because if all that is required for each of the separate entities, with respect to being what they are, remained after being composed, surely they would all be established in the third reality. At this point the absurdity already mentioned is unavoidable, and this is that the third reality would be itself the divinity and itself the humanity, sharing with them all that is required for each of them of attributes and other qualities with respect to being God and with respect to being a human being. So it is finally established by what we have discussed that it is impossible to attribute to it (the third reality) all that is required for both the divinity and the humanity, whether we consider each of them in the composition or separated from it.

This discussion requires subtle thought to be understood. Yet one of them who is ignorant about the composition believes that the escape from this grave difficulty is easy, for he supposes that he can get rid of these difficulties by analogies which are not suitable for this key question. He says, it is established that a human being is characterised by corporality, sensation, growth, changeability, passing away, and being in a location; and also established are, characterising him by attributes of speech, perception of the general and the particular, understanding, and other things which must be referred to the soul. These characteristics can only be considered if we look at the animal body with respect to being itself and also at the soul with respect to being itself.

This insanity is very far removed from what we have been discussing, because they believe that the third reality is a perfect human being and perfect God, and that all that is established in the human being is established in it, and likewise what is said about God. Therefore, there must be an analogy suitable for this very belief, but that will only operate when it is established that it is correct to say of the human being that he is abstract, without a body, not dwelling in a body, not in a location, that he is eternal, and immortal, for they are philosophers in this question. Therefore, they establish in him what is established in the soul, with respect to being a soul, and then they also attribute to him the opposite of that, what is established in the animal body, with respect

to being a body, for it is said that he is of a natural species found similarly in different individuals, in definition and reality, and yet that he is but a part of the species, and that he is located, movable, and subject to corruption. It is my opinion that whoever is impudent enough to establish in the third reality what he has established of this absurdity is not far from rejecting logical necessity, by adhering to the source of his thinking, no matter how contradictory. How amazing is this stupidity over such obvious issues. If this is believed despite the knowledge of its falsehood then how profound is the ignorance!

It may be said that all of this would follow if the composition of which we speak is a composition of mixture and blending, yet we do not say that. We mean by the composition of this reality a spiritual composition whose occurrence results from a spiritual connection between the divinity and the humanity. We have already clearly stated that this connection is invalid for what they are trying to achieve, whether the relationship is general or restricted.

This teaching about the third reality described above is ascribed to the opinion of the Jacobites.

### [The union according to the Melkites]

Concerning the Melkites,<sup>59</sup> their teaching is more ridiculous than that, and you will judge, when you hear it yourself, that the opinions of these sects are laughable to intelligent people, and that God, may his name be exalted and glorious, has led astray people he intended to lead astray, and has in such a way imprinted on their hearts and their minds.

We say, they believe that the reality of the human Jesus, on him be peace, and the essence of God, are two distinct realities; there is no mixture or blending between them, but each reality keeps all the attributes established in it, with respect to what it is. They believe that the Messiah is a hypostasis of the divine reality alone, and it is a reality which is not composed, taken from the two

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59 This name was given to Christians who followed the Christology of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon upheld by the Roman Emperor as orthodox, and was used by Jacobites such as Abū Rā'īṭa in the early ninth century to refer to Chalcedonians who believed that the union of the divine and human in Christ was in terms of one hypostasis in two natures. See his 'al-Radd 'alā al-malakiyya fi-l-ittiḥād' (Reply to the Melkites on the Union), pp. 65–72. See S. Griffith, 'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria' in *Syrian Christians under Islam*, ed. D. Thomas, Leiden, 2001, pp. 9–55.

realities already mentioned, and united with the universal humanity.<sup>60</sup> Notice the defect in these words and their lack of order, and how God has brought them to the minds of those who he intended to lead astray and to deflect from the path of the evident truth, and how they have caused the divine reality to be taken from the human reality and the reality itself. Then they establish a union with the universal humanity, which has no actual existence, so it would be united with what only exists in the mind.<sup>61</sup> It must follow, according to this ridiculous opinion, that the crucified one is God, may God be exalted far above that.<sup>62</sup> We have composed from this above mentioned opinion a logical syllogism, and we say:

The Messiah was crucified, and nothing of that which was crucified was divine, therefore nothing of the Messiah was divine.

These people cannot deny the major premise because they say that the reality of the Messiah is not composed, and that what is united with it has no actual existence. The sum of this opinion refers back then to the crucified Messiah being related to the universal humanity existing in the mind, but this does not match what is required, because the relationships have already been shown by us to be non-existent among existent things. Even if we decided that they existed there would be no escape for them, because neither the relationships nor the universal humanity can have crucifixion or suffering attributed to them.

If it is said that the kind of universal nature actually exists, we reply, if that is meant, it is required that God be united with each one of the human individuals. It may be said that what is meant is particular to Jesus, on him be peace, regardless of any characteristics distinguishing him from others. We say that this is an intellectual consideration which has no actual existence. The existence of what is particular to him depends upon the existence of certain

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60 For a ninth-century Muslim refutation of the Melkite conception of 'universal humanity' see Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, 'al-Radd 'alā al-ittihād', pp. 124–134, and pp. 222–239.

61 Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq also argues that the idea of universal humanity is unworkable in real life since if Mary 'did give birth to the universal human in this respect, then every woman who has given birth to a child has given birth to the universal human in this respect', Thomas, p. 131.

62 Muslim objections to the supposed death of God as a result of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ can be found in al-Warrāq, *op. cit.*, pp. 116–125, and pp. 154–165, and in al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, pp. 97–98.

particular characteristics, and the outcome would be a return to union with a separate human being. We will refute this opinion shortly.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, even if it is imagined that the divine reality is taken from the human reality and the reality itself, surely it follows that they have brought about the existence of the divine reality, with the attributes established in it, because it is produced from the two realities preceding the existence of the divine reality, as already described. Therefore, the existence of the divine reality which is given such attributes is preceded by the existence of the human reality, and also preceded by the existence of the reality itself. The attributes of God must necessarily exist and be established eternally in his essence. However, one of the two realities, which is a condition of the existence of the divine reality with the attributes already mentioned, is the human reality, and its temporality is already agreed, so how could it be a condition of what is established eternally?

If what is meant by ‘the taking’ (of the divine nature from the human nature) is that an attribute was newly fashioned in the essence of God when he created the humanity, and if it is intended by this that the two realities are a condition of the existence of the essence of God, may his name be glorified, then this would be the speech of someone with no intelligence.

This is the opinion of those among them from early times. Those of recent times speak in a similar way to them, only differing over ‘the union’. They say that there is a union between the Messiah and a particular human being. According to both groups, the Messiah is a hypostasis of the divine reality only, and a reality that is not composed, taken from the two realities; by the two realities, they mean the reality of God, may his name be glorified, and the humanity of Jesus, on him be peace. Moreover, there is agreement between the two groups that each reality retains all of its attributes, without mixture or blending, but each of the two keeps its essence with respect to being what it is. Then they clearly state that the Messiah, who is a hypostasis of the divine reality only, was crucified. Therefore there follows necessarily for the second group what followed necessarily for the first one.

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63 For a tenth-century Muslim argument that the universal humanity must be particular see al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, p. 92.

As for the first group, what has been said about them is clear. As for the second group, even though they have declared that the Messiah, on him be peace, is a hypostasis of the divine reality only, and have believed that his reality is not composed, and have stated there is no mixture or blending with the human reality, they still believe in his crucifixion. Therefore, it necessarily follows that the crucified one is God.

If it is said, since both groups speak about the union, then why may the crucifixion not be related to the one who is united with the divine reality? We say, they cannot verify this claim at all. As for the early group, this is because the one who is united with the divine reality only exists in the mind, and also because the reality of the Messiah, according to them, is not composed. As for the later group, they also affirm this teaching. According to them, the union is with a particular human being, so the condition of the Messiah depends on the relationship (between the divine and the human). How strange it is that they attach the crucifixion to the Messiah who is a hypostasis of the divine reality alone!<sup>64</sup>

They admit that the reality of the union is unintelligible. So how can a rational person attach the crucifixion to the Messiah who is a hypostasis of the divine reality alone, and profess ignorance about the reality of the union on which he bases his knowledge while he refers suffering to the humanity to keep it away from God, may his name be glorified? Even stranger than this is his reliance on what he does not know about his reality, when there is a clear alternative to this ignorance! What excuse is there for someone who believes that a meaning can be derived from the literal sense of the passages to prove the union, and from the miracles that appeared by the hand of the Messiah, on him be peace. This is an admission of ignorance which is contrary to the truth. Whoever is not aware of the principles of science, and who is not guided by such principles away from ignorance, speaks like this easily.

64 For Christian denials of Muslim claims that the union of divinity and humanity in Christ results in the divinity suffering death see Abū Rā'īṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation' pp. 39–42, Abū Qurra, 'Maymar fi-l-radd 'alā man yankaru li-llāh al-tajassud' (A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God), pp. 180–186, and Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, *De l'Incarnation*, pp. 30–38. See also S. Rissanen, *Theological Encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during early Abbasid Rule*, Åbo, 1993, and M. Swanson, 'Folly to the *Ḥunafa'*', PhD, PISAI, Rome, 1992. For the broader issues related to the death of Christ in early Muslim-Christian debate see D. Thomas, 'Denying the Cross in Early Muslim Dialogues with Christians', and M. Beaumont, 'Debating the Cross in Early Christian Dialogues with Muslims' in D.E. Singh, ed., *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*, Carlisle/Waynesboro, 2008, pp. 49–53, and pp. 55–64.

Concerning the union, we have already mentioned its connection to others apart from Jesus, on him be peace, and we have shown this in the clearest way. Concerning the appearance of miracles by his hand through his requesting and asking, that is established of other prophets. How can they deny this, when he is the one who pleaded, and in his prayer for the raising of Lazarus he lifted his eyes to heaven and said, 'Oh Father, I thank you because you listen to me, and I know that you listen to me at all times, but in order that this present crowd believes that you sent me'.<sup>65</sup> He is the one who asked God who is capable of it, for his disciples to be made holy and to be kept, when he said, 'Make them holy in your truth',<sup>66</sup> and when he said, 'Keep them in your name that you have given me'.<sup>67</sup> He is the one who prayed imploring, and he stumbled over the possibility of escaping from the crucifixion, when he said, 'If it is possible then remove this cup from me, yet not according to my will but according to your will'.<sup>68</sup> He is the one who asked his God, why he had forsaken him, when he said, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'<sup>69</sup> He is the one who denied knowledge particular to God having been established in him, when he said, 'Concerning that day and that hour', to his saying, 'Neither the Son, but the Father alone'.<sup>70</sup> He is the one who proclaimed his humanity and his being sent, when he said, 'A man, I speak to you about the truth that I heard from God'.<sup>71</sup> He is the one who conformed his judgements to what he had been commanded, 'As the Father commanded me so I speak'.<sup>72</sup> There is the testimony to him on the lips of one of the greatest of his disciples who praised him for the miracles that God performed by his hands, when he said, 'Jesus of Nazareth was a man who appeared among you with power and signs that God did by his hand'.<sup>73</sup> Since this was his state, on him be peace, then how can a rational person rely on a reality that he does not know, when it is possible to know it, and reject reason and forbid the text of scripture?

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65 John 11:41–42.

66 John 17:17.

67 John 17:11.

68 Matthew 26:39.

69 Matthew 27:46, and Mark 15:34.

70 Matthew 24:36, and Mark 13:32.

71 John 8:40.

72 John 12:49.

73 Acts 2:22.



## [The union according to the Nestorians]

As for the Nestorians,<sup>74</sup> they say that the union occurs in the will.<sup>75</sup> This is vague language which needs to be made precise, for if they mean by this that the will of Jesus, on him be peace, followed the will of God in the five (legal) principles, not being in conflict with a duty, or a prohibition, or a supererogatory work, or a reprehensible action, or something that is permissible, then this is established in all the prophets, and even the saints as well, who are not in the rank of the prophets. But if they intend by this that all the will of God which is attached to the creatures is precisely what is attached to the will of the Messiah, on him be peace, then this is precisely an error, and it is not appropriate that it should occur to a rational person, far less that he should affirm it as doctrine.

How is such a claim possible when, according to them, the will of God was connected to the crucifixion of the Messiah, on him be peace, and yet the crucifixion was not willed by him, nor his will connected to it? What proves this is his imploring God, asking for its removal, when he said, 'If it is possible then remove this cup from me, yet not according to my will but according to your will.'<sup>76</sup> Therefore, he made clear a distinction between the two wills. Then his grief during the crucifixion, when he asked about the reason for it, saying, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'<sup>77</sup> proves his lack of knowledge of the reason. If someone does not know the reality of an event, how is his will connected to its occurrence?

It is well known that the will of the Messiah, on him be peace, was connected to all of the children of Israel following him, and to gathering them under his guidance. This is a characteristic of the prophets who guide. The will of God was not connected with that, but was connected to its opposite, because the

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74 Nestorian Christians were named after Nestorius who was exiled beyond the borders of the Roman Empire in 436 for refusing to allow Mary to be called 'God-bearer', a title affirmed at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Followers of Nestorius later refused to accept the definition of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 which held that the union of the divinity and humanity of Christ was in terms of one hypostasis in two natures. They preferred to think of the two natures as two hypostases. See A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2.4. London, 1996, p. 504.

75 Nestorian Christology made much of the need for Christ to be tested throughout his life for obedience to the will of God, since only at the end of his life could he be pronounced fully obedient to God. For a ninth-century Nestorian discussion of Christ's obedience see 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'Kitāb al-masā'il wa-l-ājwiba' (The Book of Questions and Answers), pp. 220–230. See further, M. Beaumont, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Incarnation', pp. 55–62.

76 Mark 14:36.

77 Mark 15:34.

opposite occurred. Similarly, the hour was connected to the will of God by its occurrence at a particular time, yet the Messiah did not know that time exactly, so how was his will connected to the knowledge of it (the particular time)? When he approached the fig tree the will of God was connected to his approaching it even though it had no fruit, and the Messiah, on him be peace, approached it not knowing the reality of this connection. There are many of these texts, and they may be found in their places, nevertheless, we refrain from prolonging the discussion because they are easy to find.

### [Titles applied to Jesus by Christians]

#### ['God' applied to Jesus]

This sect, they are well known for applying the term 'God' to the Messiah, on him be peace, and I wish I knew whether the intention of this application is to glorify him because God is attached to everything that is great, or whether they intend by this his divinity? If the latter is the intention, then the ignorance of this sect is greater than that of all other sects.

What caused them to be entangled in these difficulties is their attachment to literal meanings which sound minds must affirm are not intended. How many literal meanings contrary to sound reason would appear in every revealed law, unless experts in these laws interpreted them metaphorically? Indeed a number of leading people have fallen into this kind of error; one of them said, 'Glory be to me', another said, 'How great is my state'.<sup>78</sup> Al-Ḥallāj said, 'I am God, and there is nothing in my robe except God'.<sup>79</sup> That is induced in the saints during their ecstatic experiences which distract them from being cautious in speech, so that one of them says, 'These people are drunk, and the speech of drunkards should be hidden and not made known'.<sup>80</sup> All this has convinced people of sound mind that a literal meaning could not have been intended.

78 These are sayings of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874).

79 al-Ḥusain ibn Mansūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922).

80 This whole passage starting with 'al-Ḥallāj said' is borrowed from al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-amwār* where al-Ghazālī talks about the concept of union among those Sufis mentioned here and that it was inappropriate from them to declare this concept to the public masses, see al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, trans., D. Buchman, Provo, 1998, p. 18.

Then you find that they have become committed to proceeding along the narrowest paths to the point that they become objects of ridicule to those who scoff at them, despite the fact that no vein of fanaticism throbs in any of them. It is an escape for them, a way out of the evil in which they have become embroiled. How would they be opposing reason when it is possible to take the words in their correct sense?

### [‘Lord’ applied to Jesus]

As far as the meaning of ‘the indwelling’ is concerned we have already explained it clearly. As for ‘the lord’, the meaning is equivocal and could be connected either to God, may his name be glorified, or to an owner, as in the sayings, ‘lord of the house’ and ‘lord of the property’. As for ‘God’, according to them, the meaning is equivocal and could be connected with all that is great. When he (Jesus) said in the gospel, ‘It has been said of you in your law that you are gods’, he spoke about the Jews. He (God) said in the Psalms, ‘And I have called you all gods, and sons of the most high’,<sup>81</sup> and in the Torah to Moses, ‘I have made you a god to Pharaoh and your brother Aaron your messenger’.<sup>82</sup> The word ‘god’ is applied to all who are worshipped whether the worship is true or false. When the traveller finds a way of escape from the narrow path his persistence in error is sheer blindness.

Paul explained all of this so clearly in his second epistle in the ninth chapter of his epistles, such that only someone who has lost his two guides, his reason and his knowledge, could be in any doubt. He said,

There is no God but God alone, and although there are things that are in heaven and on earth that are called gods, and since many gods and many lords are found, we have only one God; He is God the Father from whom everything comes, and we are in him, and there is one lord; he is Jesus Christ who holds everything in his hand, and we are also in his grasp.<sup>83</sup>

Notice the excellence of this statement making clear that ‘God’ and ‘the lord’ are applied to God, almighty and glorious, and to others who are not entitled to be worshipped. He established in God who is worshipped, the attribute of the Creator who is entitled to worship, so he made the creation of everything

81 Psalm 82:6.

82 Exodus 7:1.

83 1 Corinthians 8:4–6.

originate from him, saying, 'From whom everything comes, and we are in him'. He announced that this is God and praised him in his oneness, saying, 'We have only one God; he is God'. He denied the right to deity to any other by saying, 'There is no God but God alone'. Then he pointed to the Messiah when he applied to him 'the lord' which he made clear shared the meaning of 'owner'. This proves that he did not establish in him any of the attributes of God already mentioned, but established in him the hand of ownership which was appropriate to be established in an owner.

Notice the excellence of these indications which an intelligent person is quick to accept. I wish I knew how a 'revealed law' could have been set up on such utterly shameful notions. Ignorance led them to be insolent against God, and his prophets who guide, and his saints who are intimate with him, until their minds were occupied with falsehoods which they passed on from one contemptible person to another. As a result of this, they reached a consensus to say that the children of Adam are punished because of the disobedience of their ancestor Adam, and that all the prophets and saints were thrown into Gehenna. God promised that he would ransom them with a generous ransom, and the generosity of the ransom would be most far reaching if he offered himself as a ransom while keeping his essence untouched by harm or injury. Then he united with the humanity of Jesus, on him be peace. Then the humanity that he united with was crucified. His crucifixion was a cause of the salvation of the prophets and the saints, and of rescuing them from Gehenna. May God forgive this stupid mob!

### ['Sonship' applied to Jesus and 'fatherhood' applied to God]

As for their attributing the fatherhood to God, may he be exalted and glorified, and the sonship to himself, Jesus, they imagine that this confirms something distinctive or particular in the connection between them, but this is not so. This is shown in a text found in the Torah, which they claim contains the truth about Jacob, on him be blessings and peace, 'My first born son, Israel'. He (God) said in the Torah, 'Say to Pharaoh, if you do not send my first born son to worship me in the desert, I will surely kill your first born son',<sup>84</sup> meaning by 'my son', the children of Israel, and their number at that time was 600,000 apart from the women and children.

This is the wording of the Torah, and in the Psalms of David who, according to them, wrote his Psalms only under inspiration, 'You are all sons of the Most

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84 Exodus 4:22-23.

High'.<sup>85</sup> Jesus applied this to himself and to them, when he said, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'.<sup>86</sup> Someone who believes that the one who utters these words is God has been driven from the clear truth. He also applied this to them (his disciples) alone when he said in the gospel of Luke, 'Do not give up hope for anyone, for your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is merciful to those who are not generous, who are evil, and be merciful like your Father'.<sup>87</sup>

His disciple John, son of Zebedee, applied this similarly when he understood the metaphor that we will describe, as he said in his letter, 'Whoever recognises that Jesus is the Messiah is born of God'.<sup>88</sup> He gave it a metaphorical meaning like that, affirming that the factual meaning was not intended, because a father is naturally disposed to being rich in compassion, kindness, mercy and tenderness to his son, eager to bring about in him all kinds of benefits, and to keep all kinds of evils from him, exerting effort to make the way of goodness clear to him, and commanding him to proceed towards them, hastening to warn him about what might lead to punishment, disgrace, lasting injury, or ignorance that conceals what might be worse in the future. This is the character of a father that we have witnessed.

The role of son is to be respectful towards his father, to exalt him, to be very diffident before him, to obey his commands, to submit willingly to them with respect and honour; not contradicting them, but holding fast to what he commanded him to do and prohibited him from doing. As for God, may he be exalted and glorified, if one were to measure his goodness to each prophet, his mercy to him, his compassion towards him, the blessing he brings about in him, the evil he keeps away from him, his being worthy of glory which he has shown to him, then his giving him success in doing what is required, then what a father would do in relation to this would be trivial and insignificant.

In addition, the respect of the prophets shown to God, their modesty before him, their obedience to his commands, their acceptance of his prohibitions, and their honouring him, are more profound than any good deed of sons towards their fathers. For he is to them a more merciful father and they are to him more devoted sons. This is the secret of the metaphor in such an application. When he (Jesus) employed a metaphor in applying 'father' to God,

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85 Psalm 82:6.

86 John 20:17. See M. Accad, 'The Ultimate Proof-Text: The Interpretation of John 20.17 in Muslim-Christian Dialogue (second/eighth-eighth/fourteenth centuries)', in D. Thomas, ed., *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule*, Leiden, 2003, pp. 199–214.

87 Luke 6:35–36.

88 1John 5:1.

his meaning was that he is merciful and affectionate towards him, and when he employed a metaphor in applying 'sonship' to himself, his meaning was that he revered and glorified God. This is the meaning of the words of Jesus, on him be blessing and peace, when he urged them not to cut off hope, that is to say, if you obey him in that, he will do for you what a father does for his son. This is also the meaning of the words of his disciple, 'He was born of God'. Notice the secret that the prophets came to understand, which they were permitted to apply, as long as they depended on the understanding of someone who has learning to keep them from corrupt imaginary ideas, and they now themselves continue to apply, for when they see a monk or a priest, they say to him, 'O our father', yet he is not really their father, but their intention is to apply what we have indicated. In other words, that they give him the status of being a father who is compassionate and give themselves the status of being sons who respect him. David, on him be peace, made clear what we have indicated in his Psalms when he said, 'As a father has compassion on his sons, so the lord has compassion on those who fear him'.<sup>89</sup>

What we have described has established that the application of the sonship to him (Jesus) does not affirm any characteristic which distinguishes him (from other people). The gospel clearly speaks of the soundness of this interpretation when it says, 'He gave them authority to become sons of God'.<sup>90</sup> This is to say, he gave them the capability to attain what has been mentioned concerning the appropriate meaning of the fatherhood, according to the interpretation that has been given.

**[Three passages in John's gospel that Christians suppose support the divinity of Jesus]**

**[Jesus entitled 'word of God' in the opening chapter of John's gospel]**

Finally, one of the greatest of their arguments on which they depend to establish the divinity of Jesus, on him be peace, is what John placed at the beginning of his gospel. This is, 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and God was the word. This word was eternally with God, everything exists by him, and without him nothing existed that exists',<sup>91</sup> and so forth to where he

89 Psalm 103:13.

90 John 1:12.

91 John 1:1–3.

says, 'And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory'.<sup>92</sup>

As for the opening of this chapter, it has no connection at all with the establishment of the divinity of Jesus, on him be peace. This is because they believe that the essence of the Creator is one in substance yet has aspects. If it is considered as qualified by an attribute whose existence does not depend on the prior existence of an attribute before it like existence itself, then that is called, according to them, 'the hypostasis of the Father'. If it is considered as qualified by an attribute whose existence depends on the prior existence of an attribute such as knowledge, since the attribution of knowledge to the essence depends on the attribution of existence to the essence, then that is called, according to them, 'the hypostasis of the Son and the word'. And if it is considered in respect to the essence being intelligible to itself, then that is called, according to them 'the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit'.

Therefore, from the Father originates the status of existence, and from the word and the Son the status of the knowledgeable one, and from the Holy Spirit the essence of the Creator being intelligible to himself. This is the gist of this terminology; the essence of God is one in substance having the attribution of each of these hypostases.

Among them are those who say that the essence, if it is considered with respect to it being an essence, but not with respect to any attribute, represents, according to them, the pure intellect, which is called 'the hypostasis of the Father'. If it is considered with respect to having intellectual awareness of itself, then this, according to them, represents the intelligent one, which is called 'the hypostasis of the Son and the word'. If the essence is considered with respect to being the object of its own intelligence, then this, according to them is called 'the hypostasis of the status of intellection and Holy Spirit'. According to this terminology, the intellect refers to the essence of God alone, and the Father is a synonym for it. The intelligent one refers to his essence restricted to perceiving itself, and the Son and the word are synonyms for it. The intellection refers

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92 John 1:14.

to God whose essence is being intelligible to itself, and the Holy Spirit is a synonym for it.<sup>93</sup>

So it is established by these two sets of terms that the word refers to the essence having the attribution of knowledge and intellect, and likewise the Son. Therefore, both of these indicate the one who knows or the intelligent one. So when he said, 'In the beginning was the word', he meant, in the beginning was the knowledgeable one, and when he said, 'And the word was with God', his meaning was, the knowledgeable one is eternally an attribute of God, intending to say that this attribute is eternally established in God. 'Was' here has the meaning 'is eternally'. When he said, 'And God was the word', his meaning was, this word that indicates the knowledgeable one, this knowledgeable one is God. And when he said, 'This was eternally with God', his meaning was the one indicated by this expression has always existed, and he is the knowledgeable one who is indicated by 'the word', which is attributed to God. He is God, because he declared it in his saying, 'And God was the word', to counter the supposition of those who claim that the knowledgeable one, who is indicated by 'the word', is other than God. This is their belief in these hypostases, and the words of the interpreter of their gospel at the beginning of this chapter. If the concepts are sound then there is no dispute about wording or about the technical terms coined by the linguists, so it is clear from what they have commented, that the beginning of this chapter shows no indication at all of the divinity of Jesus, on him be peace.

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93 The use of the terms *al-'aql* 'the intellect', *al-'āqil* 'the intelligent one', and *al-ma'qūl* 'the intellection' for the members of the Trinity is found in Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, *De l'Incarnation*, p. 12. He explains that Christian theologians think of the impossibility of the union of the Father and the Spirit with the humanity of Christ but the possibility of the union of the Son with the humanity 'like the difference between, on the one hand, the pure intellect (*al-'aql al-mujarrad*) and the intellection (*al-ma'qūl*) of a pure intellect, and on the other hand, the intelligent one (*al-'āqil*) of a pure intellect. Because it is not possible that a human being is a pure intellect or an intellection of a pure intellect, but it is possible that a human being is an intelligent one of a pure intellect, in that he has intelligence of the Creator, exalted and glorified, so for this reason it is possible that the Son, who takes the place of the intelligent one of a pure intelligence, unites with the human being. Yet it is not possible that the Father, who takes the place of the pure intellect, or the Spirit, who takes the place of the intellection of a pure intellect, unites with the human being'.



Two ambiguous passages remain in the chapter which may cause the foot to trip. The first is where it says,

There was a man sent from God named John who came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, but to bear witness to the light, which is the true light that illuminates every human being coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and yet the world did not know him.<sup>94</sup>

So we say; the one described in these words as ‘Always having been in the world, and the world having been made by him’, could be either the humanity separate from the divinity or connected to it, or could be the divinity with respect to being divine or considered connected to the humanity, and its appearance in it, or could be the third reality. All of these are false except the divinity with respect to being divine. Referring this to the humanity is absolutely wrong, whether we say that it is separate from its connection with the divinity or considered connected to it. The humanity would have been connected to the divinity in time, since the connection could only occur after the humanity was created, so how could it be described as causing the world to be made, and as always being in it? So it is also with the third reality, because one of the elements of the third reality is the humanity which is contingent. The third reality must have been non-existent before the creation of the humanity, and it is impossible to attribute to it (the third reality) what has been described above. It is the same with the divinity as considered appearing in the humanity, because its appearance in it only occurred when it created the humanity, so if we judge the divinity by what has been mentioned of this connection occurring in time, then this attribution is impossible.

It only remains to say that these attributions belong to God, may his name be glorified, with respect to him being God, not in consideration of his union with the humanity, nor in consideration of the union of the humanity with him. So these words must refer to God, exalted and glorious. The implication of these words is, ‘to bear witness to the light that is the light of the truth by which the truth enlightens every human being’, because the truth, may his name be glorified, is he who guides everyone by the light of his knowledge to the true knowledge, and by enlightening him, acquaints him with the intricacies of his works that intelligence cannot attain except by the light of his guidance. This is a clear meaning, and does not need elaboration. Light is used

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94 John 1:6–10.

in the gospel to mean 'guidance', such as when he, on him be peace, said, 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world',<sup>95</sup> stated by John in the twenty-second chapter. He also said, 'I have come, the light of the world',<sup>96</sup> also stated by John in the twenty-fifth chapter. This statement agrees with the interpretation that we have given, in taking 'the light' to be guidance.

The second ambiguous passage is his saying at the end of the chapter, 'And the word became flesh, and lived among us, and we saw his glory'.<sup>97</sup> It is necessary to quote how this terminology is written in Coptic, so that their error and their abandonment of its essential meaning and their diverting its meaning from being understood appropriately to being understood in contradiction to intuitive intelligence, may become known.

The written form of this phrase is '*woh bisagi afer ow sarks*'. The meaning of these words in Coptic is, 'and the word made a body' because '*afer*' means in Coptic, 'he made'. According to this phrase no difficulty remains at all, because the phrase makes clear that the knowledgeable one, who is identified with the hypostasis of the word which he asserted to be God, when he said, 'And God was the word' made a body, and he lived among us, and we have seen his glory. In other words, this body which God made was actually Jesus, on him be peace, and it was he who appeared and whose glory was seen.

They have put forward an excuse for deviating from this clear meaning by saying that this word is used in Coptic to mean both 'he made' and 'he became.' This point of view makes an excuse plausible, but it is laughable because the sense of an equivocal term is assigned to one of its meanings by the simplest indication showing that one of the possible meanings is intended. What is your interest in opposing reason that requires it to be taken in the sense that we have indicated? Then, if it is conceded to the translator of this word that it exists with more than one meaning, he has committed an error here, contrary to the rules about equivocal meanings. If an equivocal meaning oscillates between different possible meanings then the evidence determines it, and yet he, in this phrase, decided to divert the expression from what it must intend and to take it in a sense that sound reason pronounces could not be intended, in order to obtain the result that God, the knowledgeable one, became flesh.

I do not know anyone more insolent towards God than this sect. By God, no more shameless disgrace can be found than that of a people who believe that the knowledgeable one, God, was buried. They bring him dishonour in saying it is necessary to fast on that same Saturday because the one who made the

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95 John 9:5.

96 Ibid.

97 John 1:14.

creation was buried on that day. It is described this way in their regulations, written down by their leaders and apostles. 'And whoever is led astray will not find for himself a protector to guide.'<sup>98</sup>

If it is said that it is taken in this sense by the evidence giving greater weight to it, then the reply is that every probability that is in conflict with reason must be rejected as unreliable. Although being called in this case a probability, it is ignorance, and the one who says it has no knowledgeable guide to set him on the path of truth. Then, if we confined ourselves to showing the clear fact that they have committed corruption in that they have made it ambiguous, it is enough for us to remove this ambiguity. If we wish to settle the dispute, accepting that this word is used equivocally and that the evidence surrounding it makes probable its being taken as 'became' rather than 'made', then the resolution of the ambiguity also is clear. It is evident that the term, according to this assessment, does not prevent the intelligent person turning away from a literal meaning. The evidence for this is that 'the word' which is mentioned at the beginning of the chapter is declared to be God, when it says, 'And God was the word'. So how can someone decide that God became flesh?

The correct evaluation of these words is that 'the word', according to them, expresses the essence, by being considered an attribute of knowledge or speech, as presented at the beginning of the chapter, and in that case would indicate the essence having the attribution of knowledge or speech. Yet this application is not special to God because an ambiguous term, however long one hesitates to interpret it, is used for each of its objects correctly. Here 'the word' may be used to designate the essence in terms of knowledge or speech, either without taking account of the existence of the essence having corporality attributed to it, or being separated from this attribute. For at the beginning of the chapter 'the word' is applied to the knowledgeable one as separated truly from corporality, the one who is God. At the end of the chapter it is applied to the knowledgeable one or the rational person who is attributed with true corporality, the one who is also a messenger. In other words, the meaning of the saying 'the word became flesh' is that God the knowledgeable one, who is indicated by 'the word', was separated from corporality. Later on its meaning becomes the knowledgeable one having corporality attributed to him, and he is the messenger, for if it is used for the essence restricted to knowledge, the term 'the knowledgeable one' is derived from it without doubt.

Once it is admitted that 'the word' is used for the essence in terms of an attribute with respect to being an essence, then, since it is claimed that this is exclusive to the essence of God, its application to Jesus, on him be peace, must

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98 Qur'ān 18:16.

be by way of metaphor, because the equivocation of its meaning is established, and this is one of the most profound justifications for the metaphorical meaning. This metaphorical interpretation cannot be rejected by someone who says that this is contrary to the literal meaning, because there can only be a meaning through a metaphorical interpretation that diverts the expression from its literal sense and which proves that it must not be given its literal meaning.

If it is said that this metaphorical interpretation is acceptable when the expressions are connected to each other, especially expressions for God, may his name be glorified, the reply is that reason, when it judges it to be impossible for the term to keep its literal sense, must interpret it metaphorically. If the metaphorical interpretation diverts the term from its literal meaning, as has been described, and takes it in the sense that it is a metaphor in intention, then it follows that no argument remains to the one who prefers a literal meaning for opposing reason and the probability of the metaphorical interpretation.

We will now show that there should be no dispute over the words of this passage, and we will take them according to what was probably intended, according to the conclusions that we reached about their interpretation. We say it is established that the True One, may his name be glorified, is the one who guides with his light 'Every human being that comes', and by means of it reveals to him all secrets. That is made clear in this passage when it says, 'To bear witness to the light, that he is the light of truth which enlightens every human being'. The expression 'he was in the world' fits well with being an attribute of the light and is appropriate that it is an attribute of the True One, may his name be glorified. This is because the guidance of God Almighty, his making clear every hidden thing, and his lifting the veil from every ambiguity, never cease in the world.

His saying, 'And the world existed through him' is attributed to the True One, may his name be glorified, and this has been stated clearly at the beginning of the chapter, when it says, 'Everything existed through him'. So I wish I knew what excuse there is for someone to take this to refer to Jesus, on him be peace, despite this being made clear, where he says in describing God at the beginning of the chapter, 'And without him nothing existed that came to exist'. His saying, 'he came to his own' means to the ones belonging to the True One, his light appeared, which refers to his guidance and his direction, since by his light every rightly guided person is guided, and the intention of 'The coming of the light' here is 'his appearance', because describing the meaning as 'coming' signifies appearance. His saying, 'And his own did not receive him' means his own who were called to guidance. In other words, his own who were called to his guidance did not accept his guidance. His saying, 'As for those who accepted', means as for those who accepted his guidance, and they were not those who

did not accept. That is proved by the intention of the expression ‘as for’, which is placed there to specify, ‘And he gave them authority to become sons of God’. It would have been more natural to say that they became his sons, except he refrained from that in order to make a clear reference to the sublime name who is God, so that by conferring the honour of this relationship he would make a greater impression on the souls.

Then he said, ‘Those who believed in his name who were not from blood, nor from desire of the flesh, nor from the will of a man, but were born of God’. He meant that this sonship, which happened to them by the conferring of the honour of the relationship, was not the kind of sonship which can be characterised as happening as a result of the will of men, and their uniting with women, and the formation of flesh and blood. The intention of this is to intensify his closeness and compassion to them, according to what has been said before.

Then, he referred to the beginning of the chapter showing that it is upon the rules governing ‘the word’ that the meaning ‘the knowledgeable one’ is based. This is applied to the knowledgeable one equally whether separated from corporality as with the essence of the Creator or not separated as with the essence of the messenger.

When interpreting the hypostases they (Christians) have followed a path which has obliged them to talk about the existence of three gods, in the mind and in fact, distinct in their essences and their natures, which is to deny the essence of God, may his name be glorified. The result is that they make the Father equivalent to the essence in terms of fatherhood, and the Son equivalent to the essence in terms of sonship, and the Holy Spirit equivalent to the essence in terms of proceeding. Then they say that God is one.

If they are pressed about this and they are shown that the essence of the Father specified by the attribute of fatherhood cannot admit the attribute of sonship, and likewise with the teaching about the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is not one of the relative essences that it may be assigned as a father to one person and a son to another. They say: ‘If the essence is one, to describe it with all of these attributes is possible, but when we describe it with an attribute, we imply the negation of what is contrary to it’. This is a position resting on ignorance and stupidity, because they speak about the timelessness of these eternal essences, and the timelessness of their attributes. So then, they are necessarily attached to the attributes and their attributes are necessarily attached to them. When something necessarily attached exists, what is necessarily attached to it exists too, and when what is necessarily attached is removed, what it is necessarily attached to is removed as well. If it is possible to remove an attribute necessarily attached to the essence, then it is possible to remove the essence.

This is the meaning indicated in the Noble Book when it says, ‘unbelievers are those who say that God is the third of three.’<sup>99</sup>

**[Jesus’ claim to have existed before Abraham]**

The second difficulty is mentioned by John in the twenty-fifth chapter: ‘Abraham your father wanted to see my day, he did see it and he rejoiced. The Jews said to him, you have not yet reached fifty years and you have already seen Abraham?, and Jesus said to them, truly, truly I say to you, I am before Abraham was.’<sup>100</sup> This is the end of his words.

We therefore say that these words were spoken as a metaphor because Abraham, on him be peace, did not see the day of his birth, nor the day of his being sent, nor the day of the occurrence of the third reality in him, as they claim, because all of these happened after Abraham. But the intention is that the prophets desire always to obey God and always to make known his law which guarantees the welfare of the worshipping servants. When Abraham, on him be peace, was made aware of the mission of Jesus to be a guide for the world, and of what would appear by his hands for the welfare of the worshipping servants according to what his law required, he took pleasure in it. ‘Seeing’ here should be taken to refer to perception, which is knowledge, but not to physical vision. Paul declared in his epistle which he sent to the Corinthians much more than this, and this shows that he intended exactly what we have said was intended when he said, ‘But we speak by the hidden wisdom of God, by the secret which is always hidden from the worlds, and God who is eternal decreed it before the worlds existed.’<sup>101</sup> He meant that these decisions were decreed in the mind of God eternally, and therefore they are not gossip or slander. This is exactly what we have interpreted.

In the Acts of the Apostles in the third chapter, the most important of his disciples, Peter son of Jonah, known as Simon Cephas, made a declaration like this when he said, ‘O children of Israel, listen to these words; Jesus of Nazareth was a man who appeared among you from God with power and signs which God performed by his hands among you, as you yourselves know, and this is what was decreed for him from the prior knowledge of God and his will.’<sup>102</sup>

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99 Qur’ān 5:73.

100 John 8:56–58.

101 1 Corinthians 2:7.

102 Acts 2:22.

These two leading people among them proclaimed exactly what we have interpreted, and the son of Jonah promoted it further for he made it clear that he (Jesus) was a man and he explained that the power and the signs which were manifested by his hands were not due to his own actions. He made it clear that the one who performed them was God when he said, 'A man appeared among you from God with power and signs which God performed by his hands'. As for this disciple who declared all that has been mentioned, nobody among them would dare to contradict him.

The gospel makes clear, speaking generally and particularly, the necessity to follow him and to pursue his teaching. As for 'generally', there is his (Jesus') saying to his disciples, 'Truly I say to you that all that you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven'.<sup>103</sup> As for 'particularly', there is his saying when he was talking to him (Peter), 'You are the rock and on this rock I will build my church'. Then he said to him, 'What you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and what you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven'.<sup>104</sup> Matthew made all of this clear, whether in particular or in general, in his gospel. He (Jesus) also said, 'Tend my lambs, tend my rams, tend my ewes'.<sup>105</sup> By this he meant the groups of his people. John reported these words at the end of his gospel.

Evidence is also found for the soundness of this interpretation when he says, 'I was before Abraham'. The precedence here cannot be attached to his humanity, whether it is considered separated from the divinity or is considered connected to it. Moreover, it cannot be attached to the third reality, as has been shown, since it is not possible that all of these things did not exist when Abraham, on him be peace, existed. The meaning of the precedence is his (Abraham's) knowledge of the decree of his (Jesus') being sent, and of his work of guidance connected with it. This is the meaning which should be taken of the 'rejoicing'.

If it is said, what is exclusive to him in this since all of this is shared between him and the rest of the prophets, indeed with all human beings? The reply is that he did not mention this in relation to what was exclusive to him, rather he mentioned it to oppose the incredulity of the Jews about the rejoicing of Abraham, his happiness about his (Jesus') day, and to confirm the truth of what he reported. When something like this issue occurs to the prophets, it occurs on the occasion of the denial of their words, and that what they claim of their being sent is not established in fact. So this is a refutation of the one who made

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103 Matthew 16:19.

104 Ibid.

105 John 21:15–17.

the denial and makes him aware that this claim is established in fact, decreed in the knowledge of God from eternity.

The evidence for the truth of this interpretation is that Jesus, on him be peace, mentioned this when the Jews thought that his words attached greatness to himself, saying to him, 'You have not yet reached fifty years'. He mentioned at this point the aspect that justified the rejoicing of Abraham. So it happens to them (prophets) in this way, attracting their deniers to believing them concerning what they claim of prophethood and messengership, and strengthening the faith of those who have given credence to them, who have not arrived at a degree of knowledge. Something like this is recorded in the words of the Prince of the Messengers, when he said, 'I was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay'.<sup>106</sup>

It is possible that Jesus, on him be peace, mentioned this in respect to what was exclusive to him, which was Abraham's knowledge of the totality of his mission, the guidance connected with it, and making known the miracles that appeared by his hand which were exclusive to him apart from all of the prophets who preceded him. This is the meaning of the laudable desire, for how can the divinity of a man be established by evidence of this kind?

### [Jesus' claim that whoever saw him had seen the Father]

The third difficulty is recounted by the son of Zebedee in the first of the chapters about the Paraclete;

Philip said to him, 'Master' show us the Father and it will be enough for us, and Jesus said to him, I have been with you all this time and you have not known me, Philip; whoever has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? These words which I speak are not from me but my from Father who dwells in me, he performs these deeds; believe in me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, if not, believe as a result of the deeds; truly, truly, I say to you that whoever believes in me will perform the deeds that I perform, and even greater than them he will do, because I am going to the Father.<sup>107</sup>

This is the end of his words.

106 This Ḥadīth is found in the Ḥadīth collection of Abū Abdullah al-Ḥakīm Nishapurī (d. 1012), *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn* 2:616–617.

107 John 14:8–12.



I say this passage is like the passage in which the Jews denied his declaration about himself. He defended it by giving them the proverbial saying, added these words as a clarification, and increased the clarification here by emphasising, as he usually did, that he, may the blessings of God be upon him, never presented an ambiguity except that he followed it with a disclosure that revealed its hidden meaning. The evidence for this is that when he was asked to show them God, since he could not comply with their wishes, he deflected their request saying, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'. He meant that, since God cannot be seen by the worshipping servants, he ordained the prophets to transmit his decrees instead of himself. This is the case with kings who are hidden from sight. By his command they command and by his prohibition they prohibit and by his judgments they judge.

Moreover, he made clear the absence of any intention of a literal meaning for this expression by saying, 'And these words that I speak are not from me'. Then making it absolutely clear he said, 'But my Father who dwells in me performs these deeds'. He meant that not only were his words from God in terms of their actual existence, but also his deeds. In other words, all of the words issued from me containing a judgment are from God because I pronounce on his behalf, and all of the magnificent deeds that you witness, which remind intelligent people of the miracles of the prophets, he performed by means of his power.

The declaration of Paul the Apostle, which backs up this interpretation, has already been quoted by us, and now we mention his saying, 'And he is the one God, and the mediator between God and human beings is one, he is the man Jesus Christ'.<sup>108</sup> So he (Jesus) put forward, what could not be intended literally, this expression which taken literally would mean that he was God. For he made clear that he did not intend a literal meaning and he wanted them to consider why he had given this metaphor, when he said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you that whoever believes in me does the deeds that I do and greater deeds than these he will do'. He made clear the metaphorical aspect since it could in no way be conceived by any human being that his deeds would be greater than the deeds of God.

Then he confirmed the explanation when he said, 'Because I am going to the Father'. If he was himself really the Father why did he say, 'Because I am going to the Father'? It cannot be conceived that anyone would say, 'I am going to Zayd' when he is actually Zayd himself. When he said, 'Do you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?', by this he meant the absence of difference in judgments and wishes, according to what we have said about his use of the term 'indwelling'. The proof of this is the fact that he followed the

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108 1 Timothy 2:5.

statement with his saying, 'And these words that I speak are not from me'. So let the thoughtful person reflect on how many clear and implied statements are contained in the context of this passage showing that he is not God. How can he make himself God? Even if all of this passage were ambiguous, it would not be possible to resist reason and believe this, so how could it be when this is the case? Praise be to God who guided us in this, and we could not have been guided unless God had guided us.

This passage bears another aspect supported by what is stated clearly in the gospel of Matthew, when he (Jesus) says, 'No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son'.<sup>109</sup> He made clear that no one knows him except God, and therefore he was denying the one who questioned him, who asked to see God, by saying, I have been with you all this time and yet you do not know me. I am a man. Although human knowledge is possible, how do you imagine that you can know God, since knowing him does not come through the sense of sight, nor can the core of his reality be explained, by genus or difference.<sup>110</sup> He turned away from this to demonstrate that God, when the knowledge of him is sought, ensures that the responsible people are certain that these judgements originate from him, in his saying, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father', in other words, 'I report about him'. He further made this clear by saying, 'And these words that I speak are not from me'. Not content to attribute only the words to God, exalted and glorious, he said, 'But my Father who dwells in me performs these deeds'. Thus he himself uttered the words according to what has been interpreted.

### [Christian appeal to Jesus being called 'word from God' in the Qur'ān to support his divinity]

There remains for them a terminological ambiguity causing some of them to suppose that 'the word', when it is used, means exactly what they have defined for their hypostases. They try to authenticate, what is not possible, a literal

109 Matthew 11:27.

110 Genus and difference were two of the five predicables of Porphyry used in Arabic logic. The five predicables were genus *jins*, species *naw'*, difference *faṣl*, property *khaṣṣa*, and accident *'araḍ*. See Tj de Boer and G.C. Anawati, 'faṣl', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, 1965, pp. 836–837.

plurality in the essence.<sup>111</sup> This is a gross error and folly which gives them the impression that this terminology, which they have interpreted as we have indicated, must be intended for the people of every revealed law. So for that reason, conclusions are drawn about the divinity of Jesus, on him be peace, from what is written in the Noble Book, and it is the teaching of the Glorious One who says,

O people of the book, do not exaggerate in your religion, and only speak the truth about God. Surely the Messiah is Jesus, son of Mary, messenger of God, and his word cast into Mary and a spirit from him; so believe in God and his messengers, and do not say three, Desist! It will be better for you; surely God is one.<sup>112</sup>

It is appropriate for me to lift the veil from this ambiguity so that the one who looks at this passage may be saved from misleading doubts. So I say one who is born is created from one of two causes; one of them is in the testicles and it is one of the categories of generative power from which the blood comes into a condition that makes it capable to receive the life force from the One who gives the human form. The second of them is the power existing in the sperm, when it passes into the womb and is combined with the right conditions, that there is water, flowing, sound, and strong, with no corruption or weakness in it, and that the womb is sound, with no disease in it, and that there does not occur in the woman, after the union, a harsh violent movement resulting in the spilling of the sperm from the womb. Now it is ready to receive the formative power

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111 The author is referring to Christians who interpret Q4:171 to refer to the word incarnate through Mary and the Holy Spirit indwelling Christ. The earliest known example of this Christian reading of the Qurʾān is given by John of Damascus (d. circa 750), ‘The Heresy of the Ishmaelites’, in D.J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, Leiden, 1972, p. 137, where he argues that if Muslims believe that Christ is word and spirit of God then Christians can say that if the word is in God it is obvious that he is God as well. Similar use is made of the Qurʾān in the eighth century *Anonymous Apology for Christianity*, pp. 77–78, where Qurʾān 4:171 is taken to support the Christian teaching that the Father brought forth the word as the sun produces rays, or the human mind words, or fire heat. Just as there cannot be heat without fire or rays without sun, or words without a mind, so there cannot be the word of God without God. See further, M. Swanson, ‘Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qurʾān in some Early Arabic Christian Apologies’, *The Muslim World* 88, 1998, pp. 297–319, ‘Beyond Proof-texting (2): The Use of the Bible in some Early Arabic Christian Apologies’, in D. Thomas, ed., *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, Leiden, 2007, pp. 91–112, and M. Beaumont, ‘Early Christian Interpretation of the Qurʾān’, *Transformation* 22, 2005, pp. 195–203.

112 Qurʾān 4:171.

from the One who gives the forms,<sup>113</sup> and when the formation of the members happens, this is the creation of the form of the members and the decomposing of the form of the sperm. So it is ready, at this point, to receive the spirit from the One who gives it.

This is the natural cause in the making of every generated being. If this is established, then we say that everything has a direct cause and an indirect cause,<sup>114</sup> though it is mostly related to its direct cause. It is said of the sight of green fields, 'Look at the work of the rain', and yet God is the One who works in truth. If healthy plants are seen in barren ground and the sun is in the constellation of Leo, then it is said, 'Look at the work of God', so here one mentions the true cause instead of the natural cause.

If these two principles have been made clear then we say, concerning the existence of Jesus, on him be peace, since the direct cause has been clearly proved not to have occurred, then his creation was related to the indirect cause, which is the word, because everyone is created by the word of God, the One who says to every creature 'Be and it exists'.<sup>115</sup> This is why it is made clear about his existence, by the indication of a lack of the natural direct cause, that he was indeed created by the word 'Be' without the possibility of sperm being connected to his creation, according to what has been explained.

Moreover, he made this clear by saying, 'Cast it into Mary', which means that although a child is created from the sperm cast into its mother, this child was only created by the casting of the word into his mother, that is to say the command about the creation. So then the word 'cast' is metaphorical.

Something like this has been mentioned about the existence of Adam, for these two (Jesus and Adam) share in the absence of creation by natural causes. He, may the One who speaks be glorified, says, 'What has prevented you from

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113 Here the author uses the Muslim philosophers' terminology *wāhib al-ṣuwar*, 'the giver of forms', and makes the distinction between the stage where the foetus would be formed and the stage when the soul will be received from God. Here the author combines the philosophical theory of the giver of forms and the efficient cause of humans when they receive the soul from God. We can infer that the author is relying on al-Ghazālī's method of connecting philosophical theories with theological concepts.

114 Theologians of the Mu'tazilite school considered that for every act there is a direct cause and an efficient cause. The direct cause intimates the act and the efficient cause is indirect divine power. Later Ash'arites also adopted this theory. R.M. Frank shows in *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna*, Heidelberg, 1992, that al-Ghazālī was one of the earliest Ash'arites to adopt the efficient cause theory in his cosmology.

115 Qur'ān 7:43.

prostrating when I created you by my hands?’<sup>116</sup> God, exalted and glorious, does not have hands, so the meaning is, I created him by my power, indicating that he had not been created from sperm but rather he had been created by his power, which in turn indicates the by-passing of the natural cause. If the natural cause is by-passed, it is assigned to the indirect cause, similar to the true (cause), and this is the word of God, exalted and glorious.

This suits the analogy clearly when he said, ‘Jesus is the same in the sight of God as Adam whom he created from dust’;<sup>117</sup> then he said to him, ‘Be, and he came into existence’;<sup>118</sup> and likewise also his saying, ‘And a spirit from him’.<sup>119</sup> In other words, he is a spirit whose creation originated from him, unconnected with the natural causes to which this would usually be attributed, and the connection is in the place of the attribute for the spirit.

If it is said, the conclusion of this argument is part of the premise that ‘the word’ is the cause, and its causality is a part of its reference to the conditional rule, and what results from it in the main clause, then that is not possible when it necessitates the absence of distinctions between what is caused and its cause.

Al-Fārisī<sup>120</sup> said, if it is permissible that such an example is a main clause, the saying of the Almighty, ‘Be and it came to exist’ would be reduced to the manner of speaking of one who says, ‘Go, and you go’. That is not permissible since the sense of the words would be referred back to the main clause; ‘If you exist, you exist’ and ‘If you go, you go’, so then the cause would be exactly the same as the effect. This is why readers of the Qur’ān agree on the nominative in the argument concerning the preceding verse. Al-Kisā’ī<sup>121</sup> does not follow

116 Qur’ān 38:75.

117 Qur’ān 3:58.

118 Qur’ān 4:171.

119 Ibid.

120 Abū Ḥāmid ‘Abd al-Jāfir ibn Ismā’īl ibn ‘Abd al-Jāfir al-Fārisī (d. 1134) was a grammarian and Ḥadīth specialist. The subsequent discussion of the possible grammatical senses of the command, ‘Be and it came to exist’ is designed to deny the Christian reading of the word of God in Q4:171 as one of the hypostases of the Trinity. By examining Q7:43, *‘Kun fa-yakūn’* the author discusses the view of Ibn ‘Amīr that the *fa’* can grammatically be a conditional term with the meaning, ‘if you exist, you exist’. He refers to other grammarians who argue that the context does not permit the conditional sense here. They agree that the *fa’* must be a connective term, connecting the command to the result. If this is the case then the word of God is the cause of the existence of Jesus, without him being caused by natural physical means, just as Adam was caused by God’s word of command without natural physical means.

121 ‘Alī ibn Ḥamza ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Bahman ibn Fairūz al-Kisā’ī (d. circa 805) was a Qur’ānic scholar and a grammarian.

Ibn ‘Amir<sup>122</sup> except in admitting the possibility that it is accusative, not from the aspect of the main clause but from the aspect of the conjunction, and this agreement is limited to two verses. The first is his saying, may the One who speaks be glorified, ‘He only has to command when he wants something; he says to it, Be! and it exists.’<sup>123</sup> The second is the saying of the Almighty, ‘We only have to command something when we want it; we say to it, Be! and it exists.’<sup>124</sup> If the main clause cannot be read as accusative or nominative, the argument about the verse falls and ‘the word’ cannot be a cause.

So I say, and God is my helper, that this discussion is strange and the people of the Arabic language use the main clause to consider sometimes the meaning of words and at other times the form of words without taking account of the meaning. An example of this is the saying of the Almighty, ‘Do they not go about the earth and see?’<sup>125</sup> The use of the main clause depends upon the form of the interrogative expression without taking account of its meaning, and the meaning of the words is that ‘They went about and they saw’. This is purely an announcement, it is not a question at all. If it is supposed that the *fa*’ is a conjunction because of the susceptibility to the omission of the *nūn* in the conjunction and the main clause, then how can it be taken as solely dedicated to the main clause, according to this conception? This is rebutted by what is not ambiguous in its existence as a main clause, and it is his saying, may the One who speaks be glorified, ‘Do they not go about the earth so that they might have hearts?’<sup>126</sup>

If this is clear our question is referred to this rule, and the main clause accords with the form of the imperative only, without showing its meaning. Sibawayhī<sup>127</sup> said the order of the one commanded is compared with the form of the expression of the imperative in common usage relating that which is accomplished to the effect of the capability of it. Since the people of the common usage<sup>128</sup> judge that when a person is commanded to stand up, and he does so at the command, then his standing up is caused by the form of the imperative and the expression of the command is the cause of his standing up.

122 Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Amīr (d. 1031) was a legal scholar of the Maliki school.

123 Qur’ān 36:82.

124 Qur’ān 16:40.

125 Qur’ān 12:109.

126 Qur’ān 22:46.

127 Sibawayhī was the popular name of Abū Bishr ‘Amr ibn Uthmān ibn Qanbar (d. circa 796), a grammarian of the Basra school who wrote the first grammar of Arabic. See M.G. Carter, ‘Sibawayhī’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 9, 1997, pp. 524–531.

128 or the Traditionalists.

But it is in reality caused by the intention which the form of the imperative has demonstrated. This is proved by a master, when he commands his servant to do an action, and the servant knows that the master does not intend him to do what he has commanded him to do. If the servant does it, he is considered as disloyal to his master, blameworthy from his point of view. So, for the one commanded there are two causes; the first of them is real and intended, and it is the indirect cause, and the second is the form of the command in common usage showing the intention, and it goes back, here, to the same rule referring to the judgment about the direct cause.

It has now been established, by what we have mentioned, that the people of the common usage<sup>129</sup> consider the word by which the command is made to be a cause and they transfer the judgement to it. They make what takes place after it the effect produced by it, even if the real causes are further beyond it, and that is exactly what we have shown from the beginning. But the origin of this difficulty is related to the construction of the Arabic language, and it is possible to refer that to its rules. So here the difficulty certainly disappears, along with the illusion of those who suppose that the reading of Ibn ‘Amir, in making the *fa’* solely dedicated to the main clause is difficult to refer to the principles and rules of the Arabic language, as in his saying, may he be exalted, glorified and praised, ‘When he decides something, he says to it, Be! and it is’.<sup>130</sup> These are similar to his unique reading of the subjunctive, but the readers of the Qur’ān are presented with evidence of his point of view by the saying of the Almighty, ‘Did they not go about the earth so that they might have hearts’.<sup>131</sup> There is no argument for their affirmation of the subjunctive, and making the *fa’* part of a main clause except with reference to the existence of the interrogative form only, without paying attention to its meaning, as has already been put forward. As a result of this assessment and conclusive argument, no difficulty at all should arise in the mind concerning Ibn ‘Amir.

May the observer consider the excellence of this discussion with its mysteries, magnifying this Muḥammadan law, which is confirmed by the most eloquent language of the prophets, and their best proof of the argument for them is, when it has spoken it has brought forward every kind of wonder, and when it has been silent it has brought forward every kind of mystery. He must be amazed at a sect which adheres to such a narrow minded meaning that is so clear to understand and interpret.

129 or the Traditionalists.

130 Qur’ān 2:117, and 40:68.

131 Qur’ān 22:46.

This terminates what we have intended and have promised concerning a demonstration of the lack of evidence of texts of his divinity, and the absence of any meaning which a sound mind would reject, and we have resolved what they believe to be in contradiction, in doing so, seeking the face of God. May God place us among those who are guided by the light of his guidance and are prevented from error in speech and deed by his assistance, and his care. May his blessing be on his creatures, Muḥammad, his family and his companions.

The book is completely finished.